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A PRISON PRINCESS



A PRISON PRINCESS

A Romance of Millbank Penitentiary

BY

MAJOR ARTHUR GRIFFITHS

*Author of "Secrets of the Prison House" "Memorials of
Millbank" etc. etc.*



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LONDON PARIS & MELBOURNE

1893

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A PRISON PRINCESS.

CHAPTER I.

NADA.

It had been a busy morning at Millbank. The famous old Penitentiary, with its many memories, ranging back to Bentham the philosopher and Howard the philanthropist, still stood upon its seventeen acres, and was still used as a receptacle for captured criminals. They filled it quite full; every one of its quaint five-sided blocks of buildings, every ward, every room was crowded.

The female pentagons were especially full, and the female officers were harried to death. Not only was the population at its highest point, but it included an unusually large number of turbulent lodgers.

Millbank, in those days, was the only female prison for the metropolis. It received all

classes and categories of offenders, from the aristocrat in crime, the forger, shoplifter, or infanticide commencing a long period of penal servitude, to the more commonplace evil-doers, the waifs and strays picked off the streets and committed for a night's lodging and a "wash up."

The first-named were for the most part tractable. Nothing sobers the spirit of a prisoner more than a long sentence in prospective. The last-named, and by far the larger proportion, many of whom had visited Millbank dozens and dozens of times already, were more difficult to deal with. One or two of them were almost unmanageable.

There was Rosina MacEvoy and Anastasia Plantagenet, and Lottie Creagh and Bridget Kenealey, and Judith Marks, and half-a-dozen more, each notorious for her own peculiar form of misconduct, whether it was drumming on the cell doors with the soles of the feet, or tearing up clothes and blankets into shreds, or smashing ventilators, or yelling out ribald songs with maddening persistence for hours together.

Worse than all, Grace Darling (of course, an alias) had just come in after a wild riot in Strutton Ground, her favourite war-path, and, still vibrating with fury, had avenged some fancied wrong by a savage assault upon the female officer who had crossed her. For this a meeting of the magistrates had been summoned, and they had just sentenced Grace to ten days' bread and water in a dark cell.

While she was borne away, battling with her escort and hungrily demanding the lives of the whole company, the Chairman of the Committee turned to the Governor and asked—

“Have you anything more for us to-day?”

“Nothing, I think, Sir Alfred,” replied Colonel Locke.

But he was at once interrupted by the matron—

“There is that French foreign woman, sir——”

“Ah, by the way, yes. That is a curious case. She has been in a week now and we can do nothing with her. Refuses food, won't speak, lies in a heap in a corner of her cell.”

“What does the surgeon say?” asked the

chairman, Sir Alfred Audley, a veteran magistrate, well versed in prison administration and the vagaries of prisoners.

“Dr. Wilks is in attendance, sir, if you would like to speak to him,” replied the Governor, as he turned over the pages of the Journal. “Here is what the doctor has entered in the ‘complaining sick’ book:—‘Nada’ (for that is the name she goes by; the only one, indeed, she will answer to): ‘Melancholia, constant depression, tendency to hysteria. To be placed under special observation in a matted cell. Light at night. Pint of milk daily, white bread. Nux vomica, etc.’”

“Well, but what is there peculiar about her?” asked another member of the Board, General Macintire, a hard-headed soldier, who had seen men and many cities during an active and varied career.

He was young for his years, which were rather more than fifty, tall and spare of frame, with a still springy step and clear gray eyes, and that fair hair which is always late in losing colour.

“Well, sir,” put in the matron by way of

explanation, "you see, she's so strange, so different from the rest. I don't know what to do with her; she seems half-dazed and in a sort of stupor."

"At any rate, she does not give you much personal trouble," said the chairman. "She's quieter in her demeanour than our friend Grace. I should think you would prefer more of her sort."

"Yes, sir; we should."

It was not the matron's place to argue with the superiors.

"Only, suppose anything should happen to her? We have to think of that, and I am really sorry for her," added Miss Cromie, who was an excellent specimen of her class—alert, active, firm and self-reliant, with a strong sense of duty and an equally strong determination to maintain discipline; yet with a kindly, pitying heart. Under a hard exterior she was soft and sweet at the core, thinking much and anxiously of her troublesome charges.

"What do you say is the name she calls herself by? Nada?"

"We call her that," answered the matron.

"Nada or Nada Niente, because they are the only words she uses. Of course, it's not her name; she was committed as Mary Walgate."

"Ah, to be sure; I remember the case now. It was one of hotel swindling. A couple of adventurers—man and wife, I think—who did the Leviathan Hotel people out of a considerable sum," said Sir Alfred.

"That was it, or part of it," assented the Governor. "But there were other charges of fraud—as I have reason to know—on tradesmen. They have been in communication with me already, trying to get back some of their goods."

"She was to blame, I suppose, as well as the husband?"

"I don't know; I hardly read the report in the papers. You see, it's our business to keep them till their time is out, that's all; we've nothing to do with their trial, so long as they are duly committed. But if I remember rightly, the woman was hardly used. The husband, or whatever he was, did the trick and the wife was let in. At any rate, the man got clean away."

"*Nada—Nada Niente.* They are Spanish words," said the General, beginning to interpret.

"Oh, do let us go and see her," broke in Lord Beaupré, the youngest of the magistrates and the least initiated into prison ways. And accordingly some of the magistrates, including Lord Beaupré and General Macintire, proceeded to pentagon Four, escorted by the prison officials.

They were led straight to a cell upon the ground floor, and the ward officer, at a signal from the matron, ran back the bolt of the inner or wooden door. The external iron gate remained closed, so that the interior of the cell viewed through the open bars looked extremely like a cage.

It was a well-lighted, well-warmed, comfortable-looking cage enough, carpeted with thick-piled cocoanut matting, while the same protective cushion-like material lined the walls, forming a dado five or six feet high.

There was no furniture whatever in the cell. Bed and bedding, cell stool, washing apparatus had been removed, lest the prisoner should do herself an injury with any of them. There was nothing whatever to be seen inside but what

looked like a heap of clothes in a corner farthest away from the light—a shapeless, formless, motionless mass; nothing whatever to show that this humped-up heap of white and blue calico was a sentient human being.

“Come, now, get up, do,” said the matron, half with authority, half in entreaty. “Have you nothing to say to these gentlemen?”

But the only answer was a sort of shiver in the bundle of clothes and a low moan, so low that the strange word “Nada,” which seemed the burden of her cry, could barely be distinguished, the sound was so like a plaintive sigh.

“Let me try her,” said General Macintire. “Open the iron gate. I will go in and speak to her in Spanish;” and the tall figure of the old soldier was seen bending over the prostrate form while he modulated his usually abrupt tones in sympathetic inquiry.

“He’ll make nothing out of her,” said the Governor. “Better to leave her alone till she chooses to come round of herself.”

“I suppose you are right,” admitted Lord Beaupré reluctantly. “But it is very curious, very. I should have liked to see her face.”

"She's not bad-looking," said the Colonel, with the air of a man who was no bad judge—"not when she's properly dressed, and all that. I saw her in the reception ward when they brought her in."

"Quite the lady," added the matron. "A real sealskin jacket, silk dress, and a lovely hat with flowers and feathers—the latest fashion, I should say."

"Oh, all that is a part of her stock-in-trade," said the Governor. "They'd have no chance, these hotel swindlers, unless they were smartly turned out."

"But she had a lot of jewellery, real jewellery. You know you told us to hand it over to the storekeeper to be put in the safe."

"Why on earth, then, did she not utilise it to pay her hotel bill?" asked Lord Beaupré.

"She would have liked to do so, I have no doubt, and the same with her sealskin jacket; but none of these things are really hers. They were got by fraud, and will have to be handed back to the tradesmen who supplied them. That is why they are put so safely by."

"It was an ordinary case of swindling,

then," said Lord Beaupré, seemingly rather disappointed.

There could not be much mystery about a common adventuress.

"Hulloa!" suddenly exclaimed the Governor.
"What's up now?"

They still stood in a cluster about the cell door waiting for the General, who had persevered in his endeavours to rouse the prisoner from her stupor. To the surprise of all present, the inanimate figure had suddenly sprung to life, and the woman, now on her knees, had seized the General's hand in hers and was kissing it passionately, while she uttered broken, unintelligible words in a voice half-choked with hysterical laughter or sobs.

Something like a blush reddened the General's bronzed face as he gently extricated himself from his embarrassing situation and came out into the passage.

"I should really like," he began shyly, apologetically, "to go a little further with this. The poor thing seems touched, and possibly I might be able to induce her to take a more hopeful view of life, to face her imprisonment

more bravely, or at least with more resignation ; and I might perhaps help her to some honest form of livelihood on release. I really should like to try."

"Why shouldn't you?" said one or two of his colleagues heartily ; but the Governor smiled sardonically, having, from long experience, but little faith or hope in the amendment of criminals.

"Miss Cromie can wait with me. I may be some time," said the General, no doubt anxious to continue his charitable work unobserved, but feeling also that the prisoner would probably be less tongue-tied the fewer people were by.

He was not wrong in this conjecture, although some time elapsed before she could be induced to speak at any length, and even then it was more by adroit questioning than voluntary confession that the General extracted any information from her. With it all she displayed great reticence and reserve ; there were clearly passages in her life—certain facts which she wished, nay, was determined to withhold.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRINCESS.

SHE had relapsed rather, after the first exhibition of emotion—not to the extent of obstinate silence, or inert collapse—but there was doubt, despondency, distrust in her attitude and air as she stood facing him now. For the first time, with the light pouring in on her from the high barred window of her cell, the General could examine her closely.

To his great astonishment, he saw that she was a handsome, nay, a strikingly beautiful young woman. This was obvious in spite of every drawback—the gruesome surroundings, her antecedent vagaries, the mean and meagre garb she wore. Strange to say, this prison dress was almost becoming to her.

The plain mob cap, with its close-fitting white frills, had been tossed carelessly upon one side, and released a flood of glossy chestnut hair; which, under the more precise rules of prison apparel, should have been altogether

concealed; the short sleeves of the coarse jean jacket were rumpled and rolled up, exposing the finely modelled arms; the limp, lank, linsey skirt fell about her in severely graceful folds and gave full effect to her tall statuesque figure, all the natural lines of which were uncontrolled by artificial aid.

Hers was true beauty unadorned. The dazzling clearness of her dead-white complexion owed something perhaps to her close confinement, but nothing to pearl-powder or cosmetics. There was no "make up" in her soft lustrous eyes, swimming in moisture and swollen with tears, no added pencillings to heighten their effect.

She was such a striking figure, so dignified, so queenly, and withal so full of womanly, maidenly grace, that the General instinctively paid her the homage that she seemed of right to claim. He rose at once from the stool which one of the female warders, attentive and obliging, had put for him in the cell, and removing his hat, addressed the prisoner with courteous deference, as though she were a duchess in her drawing-room and he her guest.

"Is there nothing I can do for you?" he said in Spanish. "I have already told you that I would willingly, gladly, be of every assistance. Is there really nothing I can do?"

"Nada" (nothing), she replied, moodily, taking refuge in the old monotonous refrain.

"You have friends? May I communicate with them?"

Then, seeing the shiver that passed through her frame, he added—

"Your friends, perhaps, don't know of this terrible trouble?"

Once more came the empty answer, "Nada;" but it was evident that the question had induced another line of thought, had roused painful agitating memories, for the woman's eyes brimmed over and she flung up her arms into the air with a wild hysterical gesture of unutterable grief. She seemed, as she swayed and rocked to and fro, on the point of falling to the ground, but then, with a violent effort, she recovered herself and took to pacing the narrow limits of her cell with feverish strides.

The place was more than ever like a cage, and she might have been an agile and velvet-

footed panther restlessly raging up and down the enclosure.

The General looked at her for a time, astonished yet admiring. Then she began to check her wild walk, and he tried to calm her with gently soothing and friendly, sympathetic words.

"Why do you distress yourself so? You are only wearing yourself out. You will be ill. I know it is very dreadful for you; but you are young. Life is full of hope. Who knows, there may be a happy future yet in store for you? As I have already said, I will help you, if I can. Only, be calm now; show more self-possession, be more reasonable. Come now, sit down there"—he pointed to the cell stool. "Let us have a little talk together."

"You speak Spanish very fluently," he went on; "you must surely have learnt it in the country."

He was doubtful when he looked at her, distrusting the evidence of her fair complexion, violet eyes, and deep-toned chestnut hair.

"I was born at Cadiz. My mother was half-English; her father wholly so. But Spanish was the first language I spoke."

"Then, of course, you know English. If so, it would be far better, far wiser to acknowledge it here; it would make such a difference to you."

"I can speak English," she admitted in a low, tremulous voice, and the General hailed the answer with satisfaction as the first abandonment of the mysterious and monotonous "Nada," so long her only parrot cry.

During the rest of their interview English was the only language they used. But she confessed that she spoke French, Italian, and German.

"Why, you are quite a linguist," he remarked pleasantly.

She shrugged her shoulders, as though the command of many languages was but a small matter, after all.

"Have you any other accomplishments? Can you play any instrument?"

"One or two," she whispered. "The piano, the zither, and the guitar."

"What else can you do? Draw, paint, dance?"

"A little of everything. I have had good masters, and I believe I was quick to learn."

She talked on with growing confidence and greater freedom.

"Have you travelled much? Have you ever been abroad?"

"Oh, yes. All through Europe nearly, and in America. I have been a great traveller."

"It is very extraordinary," said the General, more to himself than to his companion. "I cannot make you out. In the name of goodness, who and what are you?" he blurted out, his curiosity getting the better of his caution.

She took fright at once, got up hastily from her seat, and, covering her face with her hands, once more retreated into the darkest corner of her cell.

The General saw his mistake, and tried to recover the ground he had lost.

"No, no. You shall tell me only what you choose. Forgive me. I had no right to be so inquisitive. I am sorry I presumed so far."

"Nada; it is nothing," she said sadly. "Why should I take offence? I have no right to do so. I know you mean well. Only—only—I will tell no one—not a single soul—where I

come from nor who my people are, nor what I am, never, never, not one word. I will not bring discredit on my family. I am ruined, disgraced—utterly disgraced, myself; but I must bear my burden alone.”

She was crying bitterly now and wringing her hands.

“You must not take it so terribly to heart,” said the General with kindly encouragement. “Whatever is done cannot be undone, I know that. There may be no remedy for the past, but there is always hope in the future. You may be happy enough yet, you may retrieve your position——”

She laughed a little nervous laugh which spoke volumes, it was so bitter, so hopelessly desponding in its tone.

“You would never say that if you knew——” but she stopped herself abruptly on the threshold, as it were, of the confession into which she was about to be surprised.

“Well, not your position, perhaps, but your character. You may make a fresh start and do well yet, if you will only resolve to keep straight, to avoid temptation and evil-doing. It may be

a struggle, but you would surely conquer in the end."

She stared at him with eyes wide open in astonishment, and a blank helpless look upon her face, as though she was unable to take in his meaning. Then, as a light broke in on her, she passed quickly through several moods. To perplexity succeeded indignation, fierce resentment, which blazed out for a moment in her eyes, then faded as quickly; and it was anguish, acute, overmastering grief that possessed her as she gasped out in heart-broken accents—

"Can it be possible that you believe me guilty? Can you think that I, Marie Nadaievna Sergheitch Pahlovsky, could be capable of such baseness? That I—a woman of high rank and station in my own land—would stoop to steal? Alas! alas, my portion is too bitter, too hard to bear."

And once more she sank upon the matted floor, covering up her head with her apron and moaning and groaning in a very paroxysm of passionate despair.

CHAPTER III.

HER STORY.

To say that the General was taken aback at this new but unexpected turn would but imperfectly describe his pain and perplexity; he was in truth utterly at a loss, and feeling, as most men do, quite helpless when confronted with poignant feminine distress, he thought discretion the better part of valour, and quietly turned to make good his retreat from the cell; but before he had reached the iron gate she had again sprung to her feet, and, by a quick gesture, seized his hand to detain him.

“No, no, you must not go like that; I beg, I implore you not to leave me yet. I know I have been foolish, only it was so terrible to find that you, too, were against me.”

“I—I—took it for granted; I came to the natural conclusion, as I thought, finding you here, that—that,—” stammered the General, anxious to make peace, yet unable to ignore the stubborn fact that this immaculate woman had

been fairly tried and duly sentenced according to the law.

"Of course, of course; I can understand that. You feel that I would not be here if I had not done wrong. It looks like that, of course. But I swear to you that I am innocent. I have done no wrong. I am only the unhappy victim, the sad, suffering scapegoat for another's crimes."

Seeing the General still hesitated, she took him by the hand and gently led him back to his seat.

"Wait," she said, "only a few moments longer and I will tell you all. It is due to myself as well as to you. All, at least, that bears upon my present degraded position. Do not seek, I entreat you, to know anything about myself."

"But let me remind you," interposed the General with chivalrous candour, "that you have told me your name. I have heard it before. The Pahlovskys are princes in Russia. Do you belong to that family?"

"Hush," she cried, putting her finger to her lips. "Can I have been so indiscreet? When

did I tell you this? I would not have it known for worlds. It was the dread of that which has made my imprisonment the most cruel torture. But you will keep your own counsel? I may count on your silence?"

"Madam," said the old soldier, bowing gravely, "upon my honour as a gentleman, your secret is perfectly safe with me."

"Thank you, bless you. How good, how kind you are;" and again she raised his hand to her lips as devoutly as though he were her patron saint.

There was a long pause, which neither broke, till presently the prisoner began in a soft, low voice, as she once more took to pacing up and down her cell—

"A year ago, ay, less than a year ago, I was as happy as the day was long. We were in the South, my mother's country, in sunny Spain. I had no cares, nestling safe among those I loved most dearly, watching the flowers grow and listening to the birds.

"And then he came. Oh, why did he cross my path? With his honeyed tongue, his fascinating presence, his protestations, promises—

miscreant that he was—all were lies! And yet I followed him gladly. Blind, heedless, hare-brained idiot that I was, to be befooled by such a wretch as he! We were married privately. His friends, his family, as he told me, were great people—were not we, I wonder?—great people of colossal wealth and influence in this cold, unsympathetic land, and he must be circumspect. If he were to proclaim our marriage too abruptly it would ruin all his prospects and, indirectly, mine.

“What could I say? What would any girl with southern blood in her veins say to the first man who won her love? I went away with him, of course.

“We travelled, first from San Sebastian to Valencia, from Valencia to Rome, from Rome to Venice, to Vienna, to Paris, and, last of all, here.

“We were incognito everywhere; it was essential, he told me; but still we led a joyous life.

“Always at the best hotels, saw all the sights, went to operas, theatres, took our fill of pleasures and amusements in one long

unceasing round. He loaded me with presents. Jewellery! I had but to express a liking and it was gratified. Diamonds and pearls, earrings, bracelets, rings. Fine clothes, costumes, ball gowns, mantles; the couturières of Paris and Vienna called me their best client; all their newest fashions filled my trunks. So the months ran on, till one morning, here in London at the Leviathan Hotel, my husband came to me in my bedroom with a white, scared face. He first locked the door, and then he said in a shaking voice—

“‘Nada’—for that, you will understand, is the pet name by which I have always been known—‘Nada, a time of trouble, of peril, indeed, is close at hand. I have a painful, shameful confession to make. I will do so without reserve. Bear with me, Nada, while I unburden my miserable soul. I am not what I have pretended to be;’ and then he unfolded a long tale of villainy, a terrible but unblushing narrative of his guilty, criminal proceedings for many years.

“He frankly admitted that he was a practised professional swindler, that he lived entirely

by fraud, that he took everything and paid for nothing. Our perpetual movements on the Continent, the constant changes from capital to capital, were not for pleasure, but for safety. We were always running away in hasty, ignominious flight—a pair of pitiful thieves and cheats, for ever hunted and proscribed, the police at our heels, continually moving on to avoid arrest and well-deserved retribution for our crimes.

“Now, at last, the storm had burst. He found himself hemmed in; the net was surely closing round him—‘us’ he said; and I shuddered to find that I was a partner, the unwilling confederate in his malpractices, held equally guilty, as he took care to tell me, although, Heaven knows, I was more sinned against than sinning. Our only hope of safety, as he assured me, was in instant departure, in disguise, and under assumed names. He told me that he had made all his plans as, he hoped, with every chance of success. He was to go on ahead at once, leaving me to follow after dusk and join him at an address he gave me. It was far away somewhere in the east of this huge city—

no matter where, for they took me before I could leave the hotel.

“My husband—no, I will not honour so cowardly and despicable a wretch with that sacred name—the arch-traitor, rather, who was my companion, the rogue, felon, blackguard, cur, had disappeared; he had deserted me, and left me alone to bear the brunt of his misdeeds. What followed I hardly remember. The full sense of my wrongs, of the foul outrage put upon me, of the ruin and shipwreck that had overtaken me, I only realised when I found myself here, a prisoner, pent up within the four walls of a gaol. It nearly drove me mad. I wished to kill myself. Even now I would rather die than face the cruel world again. It is too terrible. I am utterly, irretrievably undone.”

The tears welled forth as she finished, and her voice dropped into a low, plaintive wail. The General was deeply touched. He had listened attentively, and with increasing indignation, to the *iliad* of her woes. She had told her story with remarkable (and perhaps intentional) dramatic effect, beginning with a simple

unaffected dignity which soon warmed into fierce energy, backed up with all the power of emphasis and gesticulation she had inherited with her Spanish blood, and ending in the piteous surrender which was in itself an almost irresistible appeal to his chivalry.

He believed it, every word. It was all so real, so circumstantial, that its truth was self-evident, and not to be denied—not, at least, by a kindly, sympathetic soul who still could trust in his fellow-creatures. The General had still a weak spot left in his heart, and she had found her way to it.

It was not her story alone that had affected him. The woman's youth and beauty had also made a marked impression on him. Her attractiveness enhanced her eloquence; her charming presence pleaded strongly in her favour; her voice, full-toned and flexible, gave weight and effect to the sorrowful details of her distress.

One way and another he was completely won over, and when he brought the now lengthy interview to a close he had promised her his good offices inside the gaol and out. He would speak to the officials—Governor, chaplain,

surgeon, matron—and interest them in her behalf, get them to make her present life as tolerable as was compatible with the rules. He would appeal to the Home Office to have her case sifted and investigated.

Something might be done for her. If she had been the unwitting tool and victim of an unscrupulous scoundrel, it would surely be taken into account. Remission—immediate release, perhaps—who could say? might come, as a slight set-off against her sufferings. She was not to be cast down, but to hope on, still hoping for the best, yet calmly, bravely resolved to face and endure the worst.

Above all, he solemnly assured her that he would preserve the secret of her identity with the strictest, the most punctilious exactitude; and with this farewell pledge he turned and left her cell.

CHAPTER IV.

INTRODUCES SAPPY SAL.

NADA PAHLOVSKY, or Mary Walgate, to call her by the name in which she was convicted, became a pattern prisoner from the moment General Macintire had roused her from the stupor of despair.

Her conduct was exemplary, and it seemed as if she wished in this way to recognise and return the kindly interest that was taken in her. For everyone was kind to her now. The surgeon increased her diet, generally the first consideration with a prisoner; the priest (she had declared herself a Roman Catholic) brought her pleasant words of comfort and consolation; the matron, in whose hands her daily fate was centred, treated her civilly, and conceded many trifling privileges which meant little and yet were inestimable boons.

On the plea of ill-health another prisoner was set to wash her cell floor.

The clothes she wore came straight out of

the stores. The tin-ware from which she ate her meals was new and good ; she was allowed to exercise practically alone in a remote corner of the pentagon yard, away from the widely-revolving circle of her ward-mates, who took many a jealous, sidelong glance from under their hooded capes at this solitary figure whom special favour seemed to keep at a distance from them.

For a time Walgate had little in common with the other prisoners.

She shrank, not unnaturally, from intercourse with them, and this sensitiveness was as far as possible respected. She never left her cell except for exercise or chapel, and during the first, as we have seen, she was kept apart, and for the second she closed the long line that daily filed to mass, and sat in chapel at the back of the congregation.

But this isolation seemed to become irksome to her ; it was little less than solitary confinement. Nothing broke the monotony of her day but the occasional visits of her custodians ; she had no employment but the tedious and uninteresting knitting they had given her for her

daily task ; no books to read but the "Garden of the Soul" and other devotional works ; nothing to occupy her thoughts which, as she plaintively declared to the matron, kept brooding, brooding over the past, hoping, hoping always against hope, expecting the good tidings that seemed eternally delayed ; for, strange to say, the General sent no word, made no sign.

His long silence threatened another collapse, and her second state might have been worse than her first had she not received a message saying that he was ill, but that he had not forgotten her and still hoped to be of service to her.

So she petitioned the matron to let her have more active work to do.

"Anything," she said, "no matter what, so long as I am busy ; anything to keep my mind employed. I don't care how hard I work. See how strong I am," and she doubled up her hands, which, with perhaps pardonable coquetry, she managed to keep white and well tended in gaol. "I will wash, or cook, or sew. Only let me get out of this close confinement into some bigger place—I am half stifled. I want air."

The doctor was consulted and set his face

against the laundry and kitchen as too laborious for her strength, so they sent her to fill a vacancy in "the large work-room," as it was called, where she found herself with some fifty others amidst sewing machines, heating irons, and skeleton figures in wicker-work, and all the paraphernalia of a regularly appointed dress-maker's shop.

Some were making uniforms for officers, neat dresses of dark blue serge and strong, comfortable ulsters in the same material.

Another lot were engaged for the General Post Office, turning out their dozens of canvas bags and pockets in bright yellow cloth, and pads in dark green. It was an active, cheerful, almost joyous scene after the cloistered silence of the pentagon, which was rarely broken save by the shrill yell of some distant Mænad not quite in harmony with her surroundings.

Silence here, too, was the rule, but it was not too strictly observed, and Miss Plowman, the warder in charge, herself a woman, had acknowledged the impossibility of completely muzzling so many of her sex, by yielding a certain relaxation in this respect.

Walgate, who was put at first to work at post bags, soon evinced a pretty cleverness with her needle. She was found to be so good a worker, indeed, that she was gradually advanced to more responsible tasks, and within a week or two was associated with a skilled needlewoman who stitched at a table apart.

She was an old hand, this new companion, a veteran prisoner who had done her hundred and odd "bits," and who knew everything, every move, every trick and tradition of the criminal life. She was, moreover, an inveterate gossip, very garrulous and still more greedy of news.

"What was yer took for?" she whispered to Walgate within the first few seconds of their acquaintance. "You know what I mean," she went on, seeing the other's embarrassment. "What's your lay? Are yer flash? You're far too good for a common prig."

Walgate, seemingly bewildered, shook her head.

"Go along, you needn't be afeared of me. I won't let on. They may call me 'Sappy Sal,' but I ain't such a fool, after all, and they all trust me. Of course yer was in a big way. I

can see that with half an eye. Well, yer about right ter live up ter the knocker whiles yer can."

Mary Walgate still stared at her with astonishment, and answered never a word.

"Oh, strike me blind! You are an aggravating dona (lady). Don't yer see I want ter be yer chummy? Come," she continued, now coaxingly. "You may as well tell me all about it. What did yer get—what was it for?"

"For nothing. I am completely innocent, as innocent as the babe unborn," replied Mary, at length finding her tongue.

"Walker!" replied Sally, with a knowing Whitechapel wink. "Yer can't stall me off like that. Why, in course we're all innercent here, every one of us. That's a good 'un for the blokes, but it's a bit too sonkey (clumsy) fer me."

"I declare to Heaven I am telling you the truth," cried Mary, with so much emphasis that Miss Plowman, the warder in charge of the room, cried sharply—

"Now then, silence over there," and Sappy Sal whispered, "Whist, or she'll get up a case

against you and you'll lose some of yer chuck (food)."

A long pause followed ; but presently Sal renewed the conversation in very guarded tones, seeking Mary's confidence with such a show of friendliness and goodwill that she got it presently and heard the whole story as it was told to General Macintire, always excepting the secret of her illustrious birth, which Mary Walgate was careful not to reveal.

"Why, I thought you was a regular gonnof (expert thief). And yer only a dona (lady). Yer must be a soft 'un ter let him take yer in like that. Are yer goin' back ter him when yer let out?"

Mary's eyes flashed ; she had not forgotten, and never could, the treachery, the deception, and desertion of which she had been the victim. But she made no immediate reply.

"Well, I wouldn't if I was you," went on Sal philosophically. "They're a bad lot, the men—and husbands especially. Throw him over, I say. You won't? I suppose yer fond of him. Are yer? You'd let him battyfang yer with a ferricadouza (strike you with a knock-

down blow)? Yah; it's too yappy (silly). G'long."

"Fond of him! I hate him! I hope I may never see him again, except once, perhaps, to tell him what I think of him," said Mary, with much bitterness of tone. "But why do you ask me that?"

"Because—because," the old woman looked nervously round the room, as though in dread that others might overhear, and then, dropping her voice still lower, she went on, "because I can put yer on ter a lay which 'ud make yer fortune and mine too, only we don't want no 'usbands browsing round to carry off the cream of the swag. See here, now, do yer know what diamonds are, and rubies and pearls—real gumbobs—none of yer shams? I know where there's a heap on 'em, only they ain't no use ter me. I wants a swell shickster (lady) like you to pass 'em off. Why, if I was to take 'em to any fence he'd hardly give me a mag."

"Do you want me to join you in stealing them—is that what you are driving at?" said Mary contemptuously. "Thank you, I would rather not risk the chance of gaol again."

"Stealing? Why, no. 'Tain't my line either. We've only got to find ther stuff and take it. It's anyone's to lift who likes. Who finds, keeps. That's my motto. Isn't that fair and square?"

"And where are these valuables to be found?" said Mary, still rather scornfully, but showing more interest. "Not here, in Mill-bank, I suppose?"

"Yes, here in the old Tench itself. Listen," she said, egged on by her companion's incredulous smile. "I'll tell yer all about it, only swear, by the blessed saints, swear yer won't play me false, for I'm going to tell yer what not a living soul knows but old Sappy Sal herself. I got it from my man, Joey Tipster, who had it from Captain Cadge, and he was told by Emily Laurence herself.

"You've 'eard tell of Emily Laurence? No? Well, it's years and years ago, when I was only a child. She was a famous one, a real, tiptop, high-flying dona; she was in all the big things a-goin', and lived like a swell with horses, and carriages, and a big 'ouse in the West-end, just as you might have, my dear, if yer played

yer cards aright. Emily might have died a duchess only she hung on to a rascally moocher—Captain Cadge they called him—who sold 'er a dog and she got run in. The chap was 'er 'usband, and that's why I warn yer against yours. Don't let him claim you, or you'll rue it, just as Emily did.

“Well, as I was tellin' yer, Emily was run in just after a grand haul. She was living then in, I think, Grosvenor Square, in a furnished 'ouse took for this very job, with two tall footmen with floured mop heads, a lady's maid and page boys, and, my crikey! everything tasty. She goes one day into Barrard's, the big jewellers, you know, dressed out ter the nines in furs, and feathers, and silks, and satins, as brave as a peacock, and she asks to see the whole o' their show, calls herself a countess or a marqueezer, and talked so big that she got them to send a large assortment on approbation to her house.

“A young man goes with the jewels in a bag, is shown into the drawing-room, where she receives him as bold as brass, buys the lot, offers 'im a glass o' wine and he falls down in a fit. Barrard's can't tell what's come o' their

clerk, and after waiting an hour or more they send to the house; no one answers the bell; they call in the coppers, break open the door, and the only living soul in the place is the poor young man from the jeweller's a-gagged and fastened in a chair.

"Tell me now, did yer ever 'ear o' such a plant as that? Why, it's the finest thing that's been done this century. The jewels were worth thousands and thousands of pounds, and Emily got clean away with them, lying low for a week or two somewhere in the Plumstead Marshes, till, by-and-by, she comes out, under another name, driving a phæton on the Brighton esplanade.

"She might a carried on the game again and again but for that mean hound, 'er 'usband, who had done nothing ter 'elp her and now wanted ter cut in.

"She sent him flyin' and he, like a cur, 'put her away' (gave information). She was took then and there with some of the jewels on her, and they give her fourteen years. Them was the days when people who got inter trouble was sent across the water. Emily came 'ere to

the penitentiary, as they all did until the convict ships were ready for sea. I believe she went to foreign parts and died there, for no one 'eard much of Emily Laurence again."

"Well, but the jewels? What has all this to do with the hidden store?" asked Mary Walgate, now greatly interested in the narrative.

"Just this," replied Sal, again looking round her with instinctive precaution, "just this. I know—it's the naked truth, s'help me—I know that she brought in with her here a dozen or more of the finest stones. In course they searched her, as they do us all, but she was far too clever for twice the number of screws, and she hid 'em somehow, meaning to keep 'em safe until she sailed for Botany Bay, but she miscalculated the date and was drafted off so suddenly that she couldn't go to her cache (hiding place); but she sent a message back all the way across from Van Dimmon's Land just before she died, giving up the secret, leaving it as a kind o' legacy, so to speak, to anyone who might come by the store." *

* I can remember this Millbank tradition as alive and much believed in twenty years ago. It survived, indeed, down to the

"Well, I suppose it's gone long before this," said Mary, unable quite to conceal a feeling of disappointment.

"No, it ain't," answered Sal eagerly. "I'm certain sure it ain't, and I'll tell yer why."

evacuation of Millbank in 1891, and I fancy even to the demolition of the prison in the current year. It is an undoubted fact that Emily Laurence, a very expert and notorious jewel thief, came to Millbank half a century ago (see my "*Memorials of Millbank*"), and that on reception she was found in possession of several valuable stones, the proceeds of a recent jewel robbery. It was then believed, and so firmly that it originated the tradition, that Laurence had eluded the most searching examination and still retained a large number of jewels. The story took such a strong hold upon the female prisoners that in more than one instance intrigues artfully contrived and long persisted in were discovered, having for their object removal of a woman from cell to cell till the woman reached at length that which contained the coveted treasure.—A. G.

CHAPTER V.

A STARTLING CONFIDENCE.

A SUDDEN spasm of distrust seemed to seize Sappy Sal just as she was about to take Walgate into her fullest confidence.

"I don't know as I ought ter tell yer a thing like this right off. Cause why? What do I know about yer, except that yer a fine flyaway tofty sort of a gal, who could work the trick well if so be yer straight an' square? But how if you was to play me some dirty trick? There ain't no honour amongst us women; we'd stick tight and fast enough to a man; they might er torn me limb from limb afore I'd a-blown on my Joey, but we'd sell one another any day. How do I know yer won't sell me?"

"If you do not want to trust me, why did you tell me anything about the thing?" said Mary in an offended tone. "You may keep it to yourself for all I care. Keep it and all your talk for someone else—I'm going to ask Miss Plowman to put me to another table."

“An’ she’ll do it, too, fast enough; they’ll do anything fer you, the screws, that’s why I’m a fool to quarrel with yer, for you may get what I can’t, although I’ve been a-tryin’ to these two or three years. Tell me,” she asked, as though she saw a way out of the dilemma, “when do you go out?”

“I have nearly five months still to do,” replied Mary sadly, “unless, indeed, my friends can get a little of my time off, and they’re trying hard, I know.”

“Yah! I know that game. Don’t you trust it. They never takes no time off unless yer a-dyin’, and then they’ll send yer ’ome just ter clear out the ’ospital ’ere, which, let me tell yer, is a far snugger place to die in than most of our ’omes or the workus either. ’Ave yer bin ter the farm (hospital)? My, it’s nice there. I was there fer seven weeks last sentence, down with brownchitis, and they give me jellies and champagne an’ two women to wait on me——”

Mary Walgate made a motion as though to rise from her seat, and separate herself from Sal.

“No, deary, no; don’t yer leave me. I can trust yer as I would mysel’, and yer’ll trust me,

won't yer, for I go out first and I'll have ter take out the swag? *You'd* never get it past the screws."

"And I suppose I should never hear of you again, should I?"

"Go 'long, don't I tell yer that the things are all no use ter me; that they'd 'ardly give me so much as a couter (sovereign) on the lot? In course I'll wait fer yer, fair an' square."

"Well, but you are going on too fast," interposed Mary Walgate. "We have not got the jewels yet; you have not told me where they are or how they are to be found."

"But I will, s'elp me. I'll trust yer. I know where they are still, I'm certain sure. In number seventeen cell of the third ward in pentagon Four, that's where they are to this very day, and I'll tell yer how I know it," and the old woman settled herself square upon her seat, intending to do full justice to the coming portentous communication.

"Yer see, this old Tench, or penitentiary, 'as seen a lot of changes in its days, and it's cooped up all kinds o' critters. It was a kind o' 'formatory once for boys; then there was women con-

victs, that was when Emily Laurence was here ; then agin the lobsters (soldiers) was 'ere, and after that a lot o' barmy (imbecile) chaps, and then some more convicts, men this time, till by-and-by it came to be used agin for women o' the likes of us.

" Well, yer see, when the message come over from Van Dimmon's Land, giving the fust office, this 'ere pentagon Four was filled with soldiers, and my man Joey would have no truck with them ; he didn't know a single lobster as he could trust with the secret. And then we 'eard as 'ow the location o' the pentagon was changed, the soldiers was all drafted away and it was used for imbisiles and inwalids.

" My Joey was out er luck then and he was mad for the jewels, so he got took a-purpose and he was a bit barmy-like hisself just then, so he found hisself afore long in the werry place. Blessed if they 'adn't made a change. There was no such cell as number seventeen in the third ward ; they'd thrown down the walls of half-a-dozen cells and made one long one, which was filled with half silly chaps like Joey. He had wits enough to find whereabouts was the

spot, and if 'e'd a-bin alone 'e might er laid 'is 'ands on the swag, but 'ow was he ter work in that great long cell with a mob of jabbering idiots all round 'im and 'as often as not two screws in charge?

"Why, it was enough to send 'im off 'is nut, and what with dreaming of it alwus and the bitter disappointment in not getting to collar the stuff, the long an' the short of it was that, instead of 'is passing it out by a sure 'and as was all arranged, 'e got dotty and was sent away ter Wokin', where he died in the lunatic ward.

"I was fit ter tear meself with spite, as much for poor Joey as fer the loss of the stones I was the last as knew the secret and I resolved ter 'ave a slap at the thing for myself.

"I was gettin' on in years, yer know, and I felt as how they'd make a nice little perwision fer me old age, so I went and committed meself and got took for a real big thing—shopliftin'—a new lay it was fer me, an' so the beak told me, an' said as 'ow he was sorry ter have ter send me away to the 'boat' (penal servitude). Bless 'is 'eart, that's just what I wanted, for there was

another change just then, and I calculated they'd send me with other female convicts ter Millbank, pentagon Four.

"But, just think o' the foul luck—blessed if they didn't send me straight ter Wokin' Female, and after that ter Fulham, where I finished me laggin' and never once set me foot inside the Tench at all. It's just fourteen months ago since I was turned up and got my liberty on ticket, and then I 'eard fer certain that Millbank was converted agin into a prison fer short-timers, so I tried another game. I got took continually for small things; I've bin in and out of this place as many as five and six times a month, and all for why? Ter git shifted about from one pentagon to another, from this ward to that, hoping one day or another to git located in number seventeen on the second landing of pentagon Four.

"I was near it half-a-dozen times, once in sixteen and twice in twenty-three, and once, at last, s'elp me, in the werry cell itself. I could have danced fer joy when I 'eard the reception officer say, 'Pentagon 4, III., 17.' They'd reconverted the long cell back into half-a-dozen

cells, but they hadn't touched the floor, and the werry moment I got ter my lodging I sounded the plank and knew the cache was quite safe.

“Of course luck was agin me still. I'd only come in fer three short days; it was a Saturday, too, so I'd got ter go out on Monday morning and Sunday was the only day fer me ter work. I had no chance ter crib er nail or any kind o' tool. I 'ad ter sit there the whole blessed day a-lookin' at that wooden floor under which was all that money. There couldn't be a doubt o' the cache, fer the marks of Emily Laurence were still ter be seen, 'E. L.,' werry small, scratched out with the point of a tooth comb or something 'ard, in the corner of the cell floor.

“That was a matter of only three months ago, and yer may bet yer soul the stuff is still there. I come in this time on a longer term, thinkin' ter git a better chance, and I can't fetch the ward in pentagon Four, although I've asked fer a shift again and again; but they don't take no notice o' what I asks 'em. The matron, she says I'm an old 'and, and the Governor says it don't do ter let prisoners 'ave what they ask; and how am I ter get inter that

blessed place? I can't tell; but you, Mary, my dear"—she had early informed herself of her companion's name—"you can do what you like with the tofts. Let's think out a plan how you can get to the cache."

CHAPTER VI.

MARY'S MISCONDUCT.

IN order to fully understand the coming quest for the jewels a few topographical details are necessary. The work-room in which Sappy Sal had told her story was on the top floor of that very pentagon Four which she firmly believed concealed the treasure.

This work-room occupied one of the pentagon sides, three others were appropriated to the female hospital, and the fifth was bounded by the next hexagon or central part of the prison. There were three floors in each pentagon, and each corresponded with the top floor, two sides comprising a ward. *The ward*, that which *par excellence* contained their quarry, was in the middle floor immediately below the hospital. The particular cell, Number Seventeen, stood just about the middle of the ward.

On the middle ward, I have said, and this was the first great difficulty, as Sappy Sal explained, for she and, of course, Mary Walgate

were located in the ground floor, where a certain number of cells were appropriated to the needle-women. Removal from the work-room, therefore, must precede or accompany location in the coveted cell, and this removal necessarily meant the separation of the confederates.

"That don't matter much," said Sal sentimentously, "so long as you collar the stuff. You can easily sling it to me through the cell window one day when we're at exercise or when we're passin' ter chapel. You're a Roman Catholic, ain't yer, as well as me? But ter fetch the cell, that's the pint, and fust you've got ter leave this room."

To this Walgate agreed, and when they had fully discussed their future plans, knowing they would not meet again inside the prison, Mary asked the matron if she might leave the work-room.

Miss Cromie shook her head doubtfully. The work might suffer, and with her work came first. Moreover, it was an axiom never to yield to the sudden and often strange caprices of prisoners.

"Why, Walgate," she said sharply, "there

is no pleasing you. You asked to be put in here and now you want to be put out again. You will have to stay where you are. Besides, you are a very good worker and we are glad to make use of you."

Mary took this refusal in very bad part and reported it to her friend.

"Yah! don't mind her. You can git out o' the work-room whenever yer please if only you'll stand the racket. You've only got to be reported and the Governor will move yer ter-morrer. We're only well-conducted prisoners here. Still, it's best not to set Miss Cromie against yer. Suppose yer go sick and try it that way?"

Mary confessed rather plaintively that there was nothing the matter with her just then.

"Oh, go 'long, yer innercent. Can't yer fake up some complaint? I'll give yer half-a-dozen dodges, any one of which will bamboozle the old doctor if yer git 'im on the soft side."

Then Mary proceeded to explain how the doctor had already treated her for hysteria when she first came in, and said that she might perhaps manage to counterfeit a fresh attack.

"Why, of course, I thought so; you must

be a rum sort of dona if you couldn't chuck a fit when it suits yer."

A day or two afterwards Mary Walgate had relapsed into her first state of stupor, accompanied by certain peculiar symptoms, so that the surgeon thought it advisable, or at least safer, to take her straight into the hospital ward. There she remained for a fortnight or more, and, as the time was running by, bringing her no nearer to number seventeen, she suddenly recovered herself, hoping to fall into some new work and with some change of employment as a convalescent.

She had not counted, however, upon Miss Cromie, whose character was something like the loadstone and always pointed to the north. Mary Walgate, having once proved herself useful in the work-room, in the work-room she must stay. There she and Sappy Sal once more exchanged ideas and cast about for fresh designs.

"I'd say break out at once," remarked Sally thoughtfully, "only it might ruin everything;" and they were still in this anxious uncertainty when one fine morning Sal with a beaming face announced some joyful and surprising news.

"I see it all straight, my deary, straight as er tram-road," said Sal. "Yer know there's bin a lot o' botheration in pentagon Five. A reg'lar 'splosion; the beaks 'ere day after day and the punishment cells full. There ain't punishment cells enough," she whispered solemnly; "and what der yer think? Number seventeen is being converted this werry week; it's all but finished now and ready to fill. Whose ter go in it, you or me?"

"If you mean that one of us is to be punished so as to get into the place where the jewels are, I think it had far better be you," said Walgate with much composure.

"Time was when I'd take all they give me on me 'ed, but I'm not fit these days. The surgeon won't let 'em give me bread and water."

Mary Walgate with some reluctance consented to undergo the ordeal, and was in due course instructed in the method of procedure.

The very next day she refused to turn out for work, and had an unpleasant interview with the Governor, who, after a few curt words of warning, sentenced her to loss of diet and forfeiture of marks.

Mary showed her dissatisfaction at once by smashing every pane of glass in her small window with her tin cup. The noise of the falling fragments of course brought the warders to the spot, headed by Miss Cromie, who was greatly chagrined at the catastrophe.

"Dear, dear, to think she's like the rest of them," said the matron in real distress. "What a silly, foolish girl you are, Walgate. What's gone wrong with you? What will the General say when he hears? Come now, promise to do better and I will speak for you," urged the matron most kindly.

But Walgate took no notice of the matron's appeal, except to mutter in a sullen voice that she hated the work-room and would do worse sooner than go back to it.

"Worse, will you?" answered Miss Cromie sternly, quite changing her tone. "Well, if you like to run your head against a wall, don't cry out if it hurts you."

For this new offence Mary was put on bread and water for three days. But the punishment had to be undergone in her own cell, and therefore the much-desired transfer still evaded her.

A fresh outbreak was necessary. Within a day or two she destroyed her bedding, tore blankets and sheets to ribands, dancing defiantly upon the shreds as they littered the floor.

More bread and water in her own cell followed, the windows in which were still unmended; there were now no sheets or blankets to interpose between her shivering limbs and the bare plank bed. Already she began to repent herself of her weak concession to the wishes of insidious Sal. Nearly all methods of misconduct as they had been explained to her were exhausted, and she was as far as ever from cell number seventeen.

However, one more move remained—to make the place hideous with her outcries. She knew from her own experience how persistently a noisy disturbance could be continued, and drawing upon her musical experiences, chose a long-drawn, melancholy wail, something between the howl of a dog and a banshee's lament. The sound at first was not exactly displeasing; it was the maddening iteration and the absolutely unvarying intonation that constituted the annoyance.

But after the first hour or two the irritation it produced was indescribable: it set the teeth on edge, the nerves on the jar; it produced depression, hopeless, abject misery, the worst kind of hysterical blues. Even the prisoners, who at first welcomed the song as a new and admirable device for aggravating the authorities, began to loathe the melancholy sound, and after their custom displayed their discontent by loud hammerings on their doors and a general chorus of discontent; as for the officers, patient and long-suffering under every trial, they bore with the infliction until the disturbance extended to the other prisoners.

Then there was a general protest; and the matron, after several fruitless attempts at expostulation with the exasperating vocalist, went off to fetch the Governor, saying as she left—

“Perhaps a day or two in the punishment cell, where no one can hear you, will tire you out.”

Then Mary knew that the hour of fruition was near at hand.

She hastily extracted from a safe hiding-place the single blade of a pair of worn-out scissors

which had been secreted long before by the guileful Sal and carefully sharpened into a serviceable tool. She had hardly time to conceal this within her dress and fall in a huddled heap upon the floor, before the Governor arrived.

"This won't do, this won't do," began Colonel Locke severely. "What have you to say for yourself? Come, answer."

Her only answer was a rather louder howl, from where she lay, of the same melancholy note.

"Come along out of that," continued the Governor.

"Move yourself," added the matron; "don't be all day."

But these peremptory speeches seemed to have the same effect upon her as an encore upon a public singer; louder and louder rose her song.

"Oh, this won't do," repeated the Colonel, now quite out of temper. "Call the male officers;" and a few minutes later Mary was carried in the arms of two stalwart warders, still bleating loudly like a calf about to be killed.

"There," said the Governor, who had super-

intended the removal, when they had deposited her upon the floor of number seventeen cell. "Now, I advise you to be quiet, or I'll have the jacket on you before you are a much older woman. That's the only way with such termagants as you."

But the jacket, a contrivance for pinioning the arms, would not have suited Walgate's purpose at all. Moreover, she had gained the object of her desire, and at last was safely ensconced in number seventeen.

CHAPTER VII.

CELL SEVENTEEN.

THE place was semi-dark, that is to say, a grating covered the barred window, but Mary's eyes soon became accustomed to the obscurity, and she proceeded at once to hunt for the place of concealment according to the indication Sal had given her.

The left-hand corner of the cell farthest from the door, Sal had told her. As she was forbidden the use of her eyes she proceeded to examine the locality with her fingers, passing them slowly and gently over the smooth planks, backwards and forwards continually, until she made out to her delight, and without a shadow of doubt, "E. L.," the two initials Sal had told her she should find.

What next? Would it be safe to commence the search below? Would they leave her a sufficient time unnoticed and unvisited to allow of her raising the plank or a portion of it?

Sal had impressed upon her that it was the

rule to visit prisoners in the punishment cell every half-hour or oftener, also that it was usual after the first hour or two to give the recalcitrant an offer of release on promise of better behaviour. Mary calculated that it would not be safe to commence operations until after the first visit of inspection. Some time had been consumed in the search for the initials, and probably the first half-hour had nearly lapsed already.

To guard against any surprise, and to prevent all chance of premature enlargement, she humped herself up, and resumed her melancholy wail with renewed energy.

"Still at it," said Miss Cromie, who came in person to make the first visit. "Well, we'll see who'll get tired first;" and the cell door was banged to and bolted with extra noise, as if to intimidate her prisoner.

Walgate counted now upon half-an-hour's undisturbed privacy, and set to work at once with her scissor blade. It was all plain sailing, since Sappy Sal had devoted her time to observing the best method of unearthing the treasure; a task, as we know, which she had been forbidden to attempt herself for want of tools.

The flooring was old, the rubbish which filled the crevices was rotten and easily removed.

At first Mary imagined she would have to raise the entire length of plank, but she found to her great satisfaction that the tell-tale initials had been inscribed on a short piece, which seemed securely fastened down like the rest of the floor, but which, when she passed her scissor blade right round the joint so as to separate it, felt loose and all but moved under her hand.

Now another half-hour had slipped away so rapidly indeed that Mary was all but surprised at her work. Fortunately her second visitor was not the matron but a junior officer, who was satisfied to call at her through the inspection hole—

“You—Walgate, are you all right there?” and then left her on hearing the same old song, sung somewhat louder, as if in insolent reply.

Mary, feeling once more safe for another spell, applied herself with feverish energy to the completion of her task. Little, indeed, remained to be done. Using her scissors as a lever she easily prised up the short plank to a height sufficient for the insertion of her hand. Prudence

cautioned her against lifting the plank outright, and it was quite unnecessary to do so.

That which she was in search of and had suffered so much to attain, lay close within her reach. Almost immediately Mary felt against her soft, sensitive fingers some hardish substance, a little ball or bundle easily removable, and which she at once drew forth.

The cell was semi-dark, but there was light enough for her to see that she held in her hands a little bundle of old rags, securely and tightly tied up with knitting wool and cotton thread. The parcel was thickly coated with dust and incrustations, like a fine old bottle of port which had lain neglected for years. This filthy fungus-like growth was plainly perceptible to touch, sight and smell.

But she did not waste much time upon this outer covering. She was far too eager to examine the inside of the bundle and to make quite sure that the precious stones were really there. With her scissor blade she quickly and deftly cut the strings, then unripped the cover, only to find a second and third envelope of rags within. When these were removed a fourth

and last remained, the texture of which was so thin, the stuff so slight and threadbare, that it was quite possible to feel what was inside.

Mary quite distinctly made out the contents of the little parcel, which was now, when denuded of its outer cover, barely an inch long by half an inch wide. Undoubtedly it contained a number of small, hard, gritty objects, of various sizes, some sharp, some round, and very much like a handful of large-sized gravel.

Beyond all question she had obtained possession of the jewels.

Having thus succeeded in her momentous quest, the prisoner's first business was to make her newly-found treasure perfectly safe, her second to remove all trace of her recent researches. The little bag she concealed carefully inside the knot of her luxuriant back hair; this had been Sal's suggestion, when minutely canvassing the steps to be taken should they come upon the treasure.

After the abundant chestnut tresses had been replaited and smoothly rearranged under the big mob cap Mary proceeded to replace the short plank; first sweeping into the shallow receptacle

all the dirt and rubbish, every atom of rag and wool, and, last of all, the scissor blade, a very dangerous and possibly incriminating possession, which Mary was delighted to be well rid of, and which would have got her into very serious trouble had it been found upon her. Having filled the hole in the floor, she fitted the plank in its place, fastened it down securely, and her enterprise was successfully at an end.

There was now no reason for prolonging her irksome and uncomfortable detention in a punishment cell, and Mary at once endeavoured to obtain her enlargement. She rang her bell, and when the attendant warder appeared asked to see the matron. Miss Cromie came in due course, and to her Mary Walgate made the most humble and contrite submission, followed by the amplest and most eloquent promises of amendment if only they would release her and allow her to return to her own cell.

"I thought this would cure you," said Miss Cromie, in a very distant and reserved voice, which had yet a ring of triumph in it. "But I think you'd better have a little more of it,

just to make your recovery complete and certain."

So they left her where she was till evening fell, but then she returned to her own more spacious apartment, which looked quite cosy with its lighted gas, and was filled with the appetising odours of the steaming evening gruel.

Some time passed, however, before she rehabilitated herself in the eyes of outraged authority. There was a black mark against Mary Walgate in the prison calendars. No more privileges for her; no return to the more sociable labours of the large work-room, but unvarying solitary confinement, save for the short hour of exercise and the daily pilgrimage to the Roman Catholic chapel.

With the observant and not too friendly eyes of her now dissatisfied officers always upon her, Mary Walgate found it impossible to communicate with her confederate, Sal. More than once she tried to signal to her in the exercising yard, climbing up to her cell window by means of the bed board, and waving her handkerchief through the ventilator.

But Sal below could not be supposed to understand that the flag was meant for her. Going to chapel a long interval was carefully preserved between each prisoner, and twice when Sal was just in front, and once just behind, Mary tried hard to explain what had occurred, but quite without success.

At last the long-looked-for opportunity came. After a probation of several weeks Mary was at length permitted to return to the long room, where presently by a little clever manœuvring, she found herself again at the same table with Sal.

"Wot's the news; quick, tell me?" whispered her confederate, too agitated almost to control her features or modulate her tones. "'Ave yer got them?"

Mary nodded.

"Yer 'ave? Strike me blind, but I knew you'd do it. Tell me, now, how did you get along?"

Her companion described briefly and below her breath the whole of her successful operations in cell seventeen.

"Where 'ave yer stowed the swag?" Sal

next asked anxiously. "Did yer do as I told yer—sling 'em down the ventilating shaft with a thread to haul 'em up by, when the time comes to pass 'em to me? They're safe, are they? Well, then, bring 'em 'ere to-morrow—I'm a-going out of this bloomin' hotel in nineteen days."

"How shall I give them to you—if I *am* to give them to you at all?"

Mary was growing as suspicious as her present comrade.

"Why, of course yer 'ave. Do yer think I'm gammy (false)? What sort of a pal do yer take me for? I tell yer I must 'ave' em, for you'd never be able to get 'em through the reception ward on your discharge. Don't yer know they strips yer and searches yer before you put on yer own dunnage; and who are you—a young hand doing her first time—to dodge the screws?"

"And can you?" Mary asked, still doubtful.

Sal winked in the knowing fashion that spoke volumes; and next day the transfer of the valuables was duly made.

CHAPTER VIII.

EXIT SAL.

A COUPLE of days before Sal's discharge the two partners had a final and important conference.

"Let me see, Mary, dear," said Sal, who was by this time on the most affectionate terms with her, "you've got how much more time to do? Seven weeks, ain't it? Well, it'll soon pass, and then when you come out you'll come along straight to me."

"Shall I find you?" asked Mary, with a touch of her old suspicion.

"That you will, or 'ear of me always at 73, Cooper's Rents, Strutton Ground. Ask for Sappy Sal; there'll be those there that'll know of me always, and where to find me if I'm not at 'ome."

"Do you think you'll get them through?" now asked Mary for the hundredth time.

"Sartain sure, deary. Trust old Sal."

"How soon shall I know? Will you be able to communicate with me at all?"

"Well, if so be as I was to have bad luck—not that I fear it—and the swag was to be took from me, you'd hear it fast enough. 'Tain't offen as they come upon a 'discharge' with valuable jewels; the gossip 'd run through the Tench like smoke."

"So no news would be good news, I suppose; but it will be weary work waiting. Could you write me a line?"

"'Tain't safe, deary. They'd know my fist, leastways they know that a letter of mine wouldn't be the right sort to give you."

"You might get someone else to write it for you. Some friend outside."

"No, no, let's have no more'n we can help in this job. See here now, I'll tell you what. I couldn't write but I could send you a message."

"By an incoming prisoner?" asked Mary eagerly."

"Not a bit of it. I wouldn't trust one of them, nor anyone that talks. But suppose I send you—wait, tell me how you're off for

things—duds, dunnage, private property, as they calls it here—against your discharge ? ”

“ I brought little with me except what I was wearing when they arrested me. I had on a plain cloth costume and a short sealskin, with a nice sable-tail boa and muff. But they’re all claimed, I’m told, by Madame Mink, from whom I got them. My husband said I might order what I liked there, that he would pay for everything, but he didn’t, as you know, and left me in my present miserable quandary.”

Sal nodded her head approvingly. This “ tall ” talk delighted her. The care and precision with which Mary spoke, and the lofty pretensions she always aired, fully justified Sal in the selection she had made of a partner. Mary was undoubtedly a great lady, or quite capable of playing the part of one, which was quite enough for Sal.

“ Well, then, what ‘ liberty ’ clothes would yer ‘ ave ’ ad to put on ? ”

“ I hadn’t thought about it. I was too much distressed and dejected to care. But I suppose I should have asked them to buy something plain. I brought in money, you

know, a few pounds, and I had a watch and a few trinkets which were undoubtedly my own. These will suffice to provide me with necessaries, I suppose ? ”

“ Don’t think of it, deary. I’ll see you ’ave all you need. And that’s how you’ll ’ear of me. Directly I’m free and see my way to it I’ll sell one of the smaller stones. I shall lose on it, ’eaps, but it won’t matter for just one diamond, when all the others fetch their price. I’ll raise a couple of flimsies that way, and buy you a nice dress or two, and a portmanteau and other things, fit for a lady to own, so’s you’ll be able to go out respectable. Wot d’ye say to that. You don’t answer ? Wot’s wrong ? ”

Tears stood in Mary Walgate’s eyes, tears of genuine gratitude for the thoughtful kindness of her prison friend.

“ You’re very good to me,” she faltered.

“ Stow all that,” replied Sal briskly. “ You and me’s pals now, and I ’ope we’ll keep so for many a long day. Of course I don’t presume to come up to the level of such a real tofty dona as you, but I’ll do my part, and stick to you through thick and thin, as you’ve stuck to me.

Why, only for you we'd never have got 'old of the swag."

There was a pause, during which the emotions of these two convicted felons, one an habitual criminal of many years' standing, the other—well, let the reader pursue her fortunes to the end and he shall know the whole truth about Mary Walgate—would not have disgraced the best and purest of women.

Then Mary asked rather anxiously—

"Will they receive the things here, do you suppose?"

"They're bound to. It's often done. I'll just send them in without a word, addressed to you, against your discharge."

"Exactly, or better still, tack on a card or an envelope with the words—but you can't write properly, you say?"

"I'll get it done; anything, so long as it's not giving ourselves away. There's writers of all sorts, in any language, too, to be got for half-a-crown."

"Well, have it written in English—what I'm going to tell you. 'For Mary Walgate'—that's what they call me here, I believe—'from

a sympathising friend. Courage, well beloved. Countess C. L. F.' Will you remember the words?"

"Say 'em over again and again till I get them by heart."

Next day Sal's place was empty in the long room. She was retained in her own cell, where she was to receive kindly admonition and advice from the chaplain and other officials preparatory to discharge. On the second morning she went out, and Mary, left alone with her own thoughts and forebodings, passed it in feverish agitation.

However, nothing occurred to show that her friend Sal had got into any trouble. No startling news, no report of the discovery of valuables upon an outgoing prisoner was bruited about; no portentous gossip broke the still prison atmosphere of silence and reserve.

Sal had evidently run the blockade. Mary gave her a fortnight to fulfil her promise, conceiving it would take all that time to dispose of a stone, make the purchases, and forward them to the prison. A whole month passed, however, the latter part of it in sickening

anxiety, without a word from outside. Then, when hope was nearly dead within her, a message was brought her that she was to appear that morning before the Governor, and she was presently ushered into his presence in the matron's private office.

"Walgate," said the great man not unkindly, "have you any friends in Paris?"

"Numbers," replied the prisoner, with a cleverly-assumed agitation she seemed unable to control. "Oh, I trust they have not heard—they do not know—that I am in here?"

"One does apparently. A certain"—the Governor referred to a letter in his hand—"a certain Comtesse C. L. F."

"Ah!" cried Mary.

The exclamation was almost a cry of pain.

"She has sent to your address a lot of things, clothes, underlinen, etc., against your discharge. Also a certain amount—five pounds—in cash. The clothes will come in very opportunely, I expect. For all your private property is attached by order of the court, as you are doubtless aware?"

"Not all, I think," said Mary quietly.

"No, only the wearing apparel. You are right. Not the watch——"

"Hardly that. It was my darling mother's," said Mary with much emotion.

"Well, enough has now come to make you most comfortable on your release. I thought it only fair to let you know this at once. I see you are 'due' for a letter; in fact, you have not written since you have been here. You might like to write and thank your kind friend; if so, I have no objection."

"Not for worlds. What! acknowledge my disgrace under my own hand? Never, never."

"Then that is all there is to say;" and Colonel Locke waved his hand as a brief intimation that the interview was ended.

"One word, sir. I have a small request, a very trifling favour, to ask. Might I be permitted to see the things? I should like to know that they are suitable—that they fit me. Miss Cromie," turning to the matron with a pleasing smile, "will understand what I mean."

"Oh, yes, she may see them," the Governor assented, speaking to Miss Cromie. "Let her be taken to the reception ward."

“And, sir, oh! sir, would you be so truly kind as to allow me to try them on, and—if necessary alter them to my size? It makes so much difference—*you* know, Miss Cromie——”

“She is an excellent needlewoman, sir, and could do the work herself if you gave permission,” said the matron, kindly endorsing the request.

“Has she been behaving herself? No more foolish disturbances; no nonsense about the doctor or anything?”

“Oh, sir, it was not my fault. I was mad, I think. I remember nothing that I did. Do be so good as to concede what I ask;” and Mary turned her fine eyes on the old Governor with an appealing, eloquent look, that was not without effect upon the hard-headed, rather unimpressionable veteran.

“Well, she can have them to alter. Only see the things are carefully examined before she is permitted to handle them. There might be some improper and clandestine communication concealed in the clothes. The whole affair may be ‘bogus.’ We cannot be too careful.”

And with this exhibition of shrewd pro-

fessional caution Colonel Locke dismissed the prisoner.

Mary Walgate was now in the seventh heaven of delight. This box of clothes—two neat dresses, a cloth jacket and a change of underlinen, all neatly packed in a small new dress basket of brown canvas—was the dove with the olive branch, the messenger of hope and deliverance. She knew now that Sal had got through safely and was loyally as good as her word.

There was now a large rift in the dark cloud that had overshadowed her, and the future beyond shone out like the sun's rays on a distant horizon. Mary Walgate was greatly pleased, too, with the garments that had so providentially reached her. She had owned many more brilliant and more *chic* costumes, but none that were more acceptable or likely to prove more useful on her re-entry into the world.

Old Sal had faithfully carried out the instructions which Mary—a little doubtful of her friend's good taste—had given her before she left, and had bought only what was simple and

unpretending, but capable by clever contrivance of being turned into very becoming attire.

Here is the inventory:—

One dress was a strong, sensible, work-a-day brown serge, trimmed with black braid; to go with it was a brown felt hat with black satin ribbons, and a short covert coat of dark brown cloth. A second dress, for smarter occasions, was of grey, smooth cloth, trimmed with cream guipure, and to accompany it a sweet little bonnet of black lace brightened by a single spray of yellow orchids. All other accessories were included in the little outfit: tan-coloured suède gloves, veils of lace and tulle, one or two silk neckerchiefs, three pairs of dainty stockings, smart shoes, one pair of patent, the other of Russia leather, made from Mary's own last at a shop indicated to Sal where Mary had fortunately paid her bill.

The dresses had been bought from stock at one of the big houses in Oxford Street, as nearly as possible to Mary's size and shape, so far as Sal could remember them.

Of course they did not fit exactly, but Mary had permission and ample time before her to

make the necessary alterations. The only question was where they should be carried out. Not in the long room, certainly, in the presence of thirty odd envious companions.

Feminine fondness for dress is not confined to the virtuous and free. Prisoners possess it too; and it is curious to observe the keen interest they take in the dress and appearance of any chance lady visitors. To have allowed Mary to openly exhibit her precious belongings would have created a rebellion in the work-room and when the time came to carry out their rearrangement Miss Cromie thought it would be prudent to relegate the prisoner to the privacy of her own cell.

Even here she had many admiring visitors: the matron often looked in, and the ward officers, not entirely for disciplinary reasons, but a little to watch the consummate cleverness and good taste that Mary Walgate displayed.

"She might have been bred a dressmaker," said Miss Cromie to a small group of officers, with an air of conviction, after seeing her try on for the last time the bodice of her brown serge, which now fitted her like wax.

"At any rate it was born in her. She'd make a fortune at it outside."

"As she would at most things if she had her own way."

"And not too many questions asked," added Miss Cromie a little doubtfully. "I wonder if we shall ever see her here again? Anyway, this time we've nearly done with her."

For now the day of Mary's release was at hand.

CHAPTER IX.

DISCHARGED.

ON the morning that Mary Walgate was to be released there was rather more than usual interest taken in the day's proceedings. All the female officers who were off duty, as many more as could escape for the moment from their regular occupations, the clerks in the Governor's office, the Governor himself, the surgeon and the chaplain, had collected about the inner gates and the entrances to the neighbouring pentagons.

The discharges one by one filed across to the waiting-room, where they were settled with, receiving their somewhat meagre prison earnings, and with them a word of caution or encouragement as to their future behaviour.

These were more or less commonplace prisoners; all wore their own clothing; some poor things were in sordid rags that told their own tale of want and suffering, perpetual penury, thriftlessness, and vicious self-indulgence,

ending in crime ; others flaunted forth in faded finery, battered and bruised straw hats with ragged ribbons and demoralised flowers, skirts that had been silken, and high-heeled boots that had lost half their buttons.

One outgoing prisoner was the notorious Lottie Creagh, who had just completed her twentieth sentence for an offence similar to that which had brought Mary Walgate into Millbank, but on a much smaller scale and a much less imposing stock-in-trade. Miss Creagh's last fraud had been perpetrated in a costume which should hardly have deceived the most confiding landlord ; it was merely a white cashmere opera cloak and a pink satin skirt.

Now, appavelled in this rather incongruous attire, having regard to the broad sunlight and the grey prison surroundings, Lottie strutted across to receive her pittance with a mincing step and a self-satisfied air that on any other morning would have brought a smile upon the face of even the gravest official.

But neither Lottie's walk nor her usual valedictory protest against the injustice of

putting her to herd with common prisoners—she, a young lady of another and the highest social class (she had been a ballet-dancer at a transpontine penny gaff)—had attracted much attention this particular morning.

She was followed by a prisoner who had, upon the face of it, more substantial claims to the high consideration that Lottie so ludicrously failed to establish.

There was a little buzz of excited interest when 19203, Mary Walgate, issued from the side door or wicket of pentagon One, and crossed the yard to go through the same formalities as the rest.

“She does look a lady, every inch of her,” whispered one young female assistant-warder to another.

“A great lady, too. I wonder what’s the mystery about her? She might be a princess, indeed.”

During the latter part of her incarceration the warders had come to call her “the princess” among themselves. It had got out that at that first interview with General Macintire there had been some mention of her high rank.

As time passed and Mary became better known and better behaved, she seemed to exact, naturally and without an effort, a certain consideration from her officers. There were an air and a manner about her, a kind of tolerant but very dignified hauteur, which, with one or two exceptions, imposed upon them, even the oldest, for all their experience and professional distrust, and won from them by degrees an almost deferential respect.

This was quite obvious on the morning of her discharge. When she now appeared dressed in perfect taste, wearing her unpretending but fashionably-cut clothes with quiet and refined distinction, it was clear to most of those who saw her that she was a personage of some sort; whatever her secret history, whether sinned against or sinning, she was evidently a lady born and bred, possibly one of title—even a princess.

She herself encouraged the idea by the self-possession with which she bore the critical examination of so many perplexed spectators, walking erect with calm deliberate step and perfectly composed features straight into the

office, where she bowed with haughty condescension to the assembled officials and took the seat which was not offered to her, quite as a matter of course.

"Where do I sign? Here? Is it necessary? I am sure everything is quite right. You are very good, thank you. I am so much obliged."

This to the clerk, who offered her a pen.

"Is there anything more? No? Then I presume I may now leave. I asked that a cab might be in waiting—a four-wheeler—I thought a brougham would be out of place. Has it been called?"

"It's inside the gate. Your portmanteau is on top, and you may go as soon as you please," answered Miss Cromie gruffly.

The sturdy, sensible matron had never yielded much credence to this high-toned prisoner's pretensions, and now greatly resented her airs.

"Then I will say good-day. Thank you, Colonel Locke, for all your kindness and attention, and to you, matron, and your officers as well. Whether you have been exactly what a person in my unfortunate position would

reasonably have expected I will not now discuss. But I bear no malice and I wish you well. Again good-morning and good-bye," and with a superb curtsy to the assembled company Mary Walgate sailed away.

There was some little delay at the outer gates, which had to be unbarred to allow egress for the cab. Just as it was passing under the last portal its fair occupant put her head out of the window and said in a pleasant voice—

"One moment, please. Will you kindly give me the right time? I have to catch a train."

"It wants three minutes of nine," said the gatekeeper.

"Thank you so much," replied Mary sweetly, as she deftly wound up and regulated a tiny keyless gold watch. "That will do. Tell him, please, to drive on—Victoria Station, the Chatham and Dover line."

"Well," grunted the gatekeeper, as the cab rolled slowly on, "if that don't beat all. She's just done her nine months' hard, and you'd think she was a bloomin' duchess. My wig! I wonder what'll be her next lay?"

Something of the same kind was in the mind of a man who was waiting outside, and who had hung about all the morning, forming one of the crowd of loafers and prisoners' friends that daily assisted at the exodus from the penitentiary.

He was dressed like a seedy swell, in a suit of shabby tweed, with a bowler hat, all much the worse for wear. The edges of the trousers were frayed, the hat greasy and discoloured, but he had gloves on, and a huge glass pin in his large expanse of ragged neck-tie. His whole appearance was rather ragged, indeed, from the long untidy hair, the straggling beard and moustache to the broken, badly-patched, but once smart button-boots.

They hurt him, too, these well-worn boots, and made him limp as he started off to give chase to the cab. It travelled faster than he did, but he knew its direction, for he had heard it given, and on reaching the bottom of the Vauxhall Bridge Road he found the tramcar just on the move going upward.

He jumped in and was quickly carried as far as Lillington Street, where he left it, making

his way thence to Victoria Station, which he reached almost as soon as the cab.

He had hardly left Millbank many minutes before there were inquiries made at the prison gate, which were evidently meant for him.

"Discharges gone yet?" a quiet, respectable-looking man, dressed in black and wearing a tall hat, asked of the gatekeeper.

"Oh, long ago, Mr. Mordaunt. Did you want anyone? We had no notice."

"No more had I till half an hour ago, when the superintendent told me a woman was to be released to-day whose husband is wanted. We thought he might be here to meet her."

"Who was the woman? Walgate?"

"Exactly. Was she met?"

"I think not. At least she left this in a cab for Victoria Station, Chatham and Dover line, and I saw no one accost her or stop it. Stay, I've an idea now someone ran after the cab."

"Did he hail it, or what?"

"No, he was only running for his life. He'd been here all the morning—a seedy-

looking chap in drab dittoes and a bowler hat."

"Ah, Victoria Station, you said? I'll hurry up there now. I'll be as quick as them, I daresay," and he beckoned to a passing hansom, continuing his inquiries while it approached. "What like was she on discharge? As much of a lady as when they took her?"

"Ay, and more so. Had out her gold tucker to ask me the time as neat as ninepence, and talked as pretty as a duchess."

"Yes, yes; but how was she dressed?"

"I didn't see more than a brown sort of hat and a light drab coat or jacket——"

"That's good enough for me," said the detective, cutting him short and jumping into the cab. "Now, Victoria, Chatham and Dover, as quick as you know!"

CHAPTER X.

SETTLING WITH WALGATE.

WHEN Hugh Walgate reached the main entrance of the Chatham and Dover station, the driver of a four-wheeled cab, which had just set down a fare, was gathering up his rug and turning to take his whip from the roof preparatory to driving off.

"Have you just come from the Tench, mate?" asked Walgate breathlessly.

"Ay, lad, with a lady; leastways, one who behaved as such," and he smacked his pockets with much satisfaction.

"What became of her? I've a message for her!"

"You don't seem much the sort for her to have any truck with. Wot sort of message?"

"Well, it's to her advantage. Here's a tizzy to tell me which way she was going."

"You're not a copper, are you? A blooming detective under that seedy suit? If so, you'll

get nothing from me that'd do that sweet creature harm."

"Not me. The harm'll come from my not finding her."

"Well, as soon as she got out she told the porter to take her baggage to the cloak-room, and that's where you'll find her unless she's gone away."

Walgate needed no further direction, but hastened inside the station. He was just in time to see a female at the window of the left property office; her back was towards him at first, but as he approached she turned, in the act of folding up and putting away the baggage ticket in her purse. This done, she lifted her eyes and met her husband's as he stood before her, face to face.

Neither spoke for some time—not in words; but eyes and looks were eloquent enough. Hers expressed first indignant surprise, then, still more plainly, loathing and contempt.

His eyes were threatening, insolent, and overbearing, but they wavered as they encountered her unmistakable resentment, and presently he dropped them, cowed, abashed,

in the presence of this fierce creature whom he had so cruelly wronged. But now he spoke in a weak, cringing voice—

“Marie, won’t you forgive me? Are you quite implacable? You know it was not my fault——”

“Whose, then—mine? Was it I who so basely lied, whose every word, every pretence was false and perjured? Who deceived a poor, confiding girl——”

“Come, come. The deceit was not all on my side. You called yourself a princ——”

“Called myself? I could prove that I was. But I will not condescend to argue that point or any other. I will only tell you, here and now, on the first occasion that I meet you after your infamous deception and desertion, that I have done with you for ever. I am glad to have the chance of speaking to you so soon.”

“You can’t leave me; you are my wife. I have a hold on you,” began Walgate, in a dogged, surly tone, which showed that his evil temper was working within him, and that he might be dangerous if provoked too far.

"This place is too public for a scene," said Mary, calmly. "I've something to say to you not too pleasant, perhaps, and the words burn my tongue till they are out. Where shall we go?"

"There is an Italian coffee-shop over the way. We can have a private room if *you* can pay for it. *I* can't."

"I didn't suppose *you* could," sneered Mary. "Go on in front. I'll follow; but I don't choose to be seen walking with such a cad."

He obeyed without a murmur, and they left the station by the Brighton side just as Mr. Mordaunt, the detective, hurried in. His quick eyes made out the retreating figures, and recognised both from the prison gatekeeper's description. It would have been possible to arrest the man at once, running a certain risk, for Mordaunt had not been concerned in the original case, and could not swear to either Walgate or his wife.

He thought it more prudent to shadow them, determined on no account to lose sight of the man, to stick to him, mark him down, seizing the first opportunity of communicating

with Scotland Yard and obtaining the necessary help.

The Walgates walked on, husband leading by several yards, wife in his wake, across the station, crowded with cabs and omnibuses, into the Buckingham Palace Road, to the clean and convenient restaurant of one Cesare Malamocco.

Mr. Mordaunt was close at their heels all the time till they entered the restaurant, when he paused for five minutes before he followed them in.

"Good-day, Mr. Cesar," at length said the detective cheerily to a little black-visaged, oily Italian, who came forward at once, bowing as though there was a hinge in his back, and uttering warm welcomes with a wild flourish of gesticulation.

The police were always made much of in this particular house of call. Signor Malamocco was from Naples and old enough to remember the despotism of Bomba. It was well to stand in with the Government.

"This is a pleasure, truly! Mr. Mordaunt himself! What will you take, worthy sir

Ecco, Bambinaccio, *Subito* (quick), glasses and—won't you give it a name?"

"No, no, Mr. Cesar, it's too early for that. But you can do me a good turn. Just now two people, man and woman, first seedy, second well dressed, came in here. Where are they now?"

"Man and woman? To be sure. They are now in number three. Are they wanted? All right. Only you won't make the arrest here? Not in public? It might do me much harm."

"Your good name shall be respected, never fear. But I must watch them closely. Can you put me into the next room?"

"*Sicuro*. Certainly. Number four is vacant. Come along with me."

"One moment; let me write a line, please. I must send to Scotland Yard and get someone round to identify."

The inspector hastily wrote a letter, which he sealed carefully and addressed to the Superintendent, Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard. Then he hailed a hansom, and sent it off with brief instructions.

"Take this to its address, wait answer, and

return here—understand? Your number is——? Well, come round for payment by-and-by, to the Yard if I am gone when you get back. Look slippy now; off you go.”

Then Mr. Mordaunt followed the landlord upstairs.

Meanwhile Mr. and Mrs. Walgate, a very ill-assorted and mutually defiant couple, had taken possession of cabinet number three.

“I daresay you can eat something,” suggested Mary ungraciously.

“I’ve had no breakfast yet,” answered Walgate humbly.

“No more have I,” said Mary, ringing the bell; “nothing but my morning gruel, and it was hardly as sustaining or appetising as rolls and *café au lait*. Waiter, bring anything you have ready, hot or cold, and a pint of good Burgundy—will that suit you?” to Walgate.

“Better make it a whole bottle. We have much to say.”

“I’m not so sure of that. What I have to say will not take long. It simply amounts to this: what will you take to go away—far away?”

"For long?"

"For ever; so that I shall never see or hear of you again."

"You are in funds, then?" said Walgate, avoiding the direct question. "How on earth did you manage? What an out-and-out clever woman you are. What wonders we might still work together——"

"Do not think of it. Dismiss such an idea from your mind utterly. Nothing, absolutely nothing, will induce me to have anything to do with you again," said Mary, with icy firmness. "Answer my question."

"It depends. How much are you good for?"

"Would two pounds a week satisfy you?"

"How are you going to get them? I have at least a right to know that."

"I will work, slave, struggle, wear the skin off my fingers, the flesh off my bones, anything sooner than endure your hateful companionship. I tell you I loathe and detest you. I will pay any price within reason."

"Make it five pounds a week, then," whined Walgate.

"No, that is more than I can manage. I can promise you two."

"I tell you I won't take them. If you can pay two you can pay twenty, and twenty I will have or know the reason why. If you don't, I'll go to the fountain-head and ask for myself."

"Fountain-head?" asked Mary, seemingly amazed.

"Yes; to those who have put you up to some dodge for doing the public."

"You low, mean, contemptible cur!" cried Mary in a tone of deep, concentrated scorn. "You think nothing of aspersing your wife's good name, of throwing mud upon her after you had trapped her, disgraced her, left her in the lurch."

"Look here, Mary Walgate, I want none of your high and mighty tragedy-queen talk. I know my rights and how to enforce them. You are my lawful wife, bound by law to live with me, your lawful husband, and if you do not consent to my terms I shall appeal to the law for protection."

Mary laughed aloud in bitter derision.

"Appeal to the law, then. The law will

be delighted, I'm sure. It has been looking out for you these months past, Hugh Walgate, and has to settle accounts with you. You thought to make me your scapegoat, but you are liable yourself, still. Once for all, will you accept my terms? "

"Never, while there is a chance of better; and you are worth far more. I can see that plainly, and only wish I had made more use of you before. You shall not get rid of me at any price. You belong to me, and I'll keep you, make use of you, bend you, break you, you—you——"

The ruffian was now thoroughly aroused, and like the vile coward that he was, gave full vent to his feelings because he thought he had her quite in his power.

He even left his seat, and with fresh foul-mouthed abuse approached her menacingly, shaking his fists.

"Stand back!" she cried, with her hand on the bell. "Remember where you are. Use another threat, another ugly word, and I will summon help, call for the police, denounce you——"

"It is not at all necessary, my dear," said a strange voice at the now open doorway. "We have come of our own accord, and are very much pleased to lay hands on Hugh Walgate at last."

"It is a trap, a dirty trick of this vixenish hell-cat!" cried Walgate as he struggled vainly in the hands of the police—Mr. Mordaunt and another but just arrived from Scotland Yard.

"The trap was of your own setting. I did not bring you here," replied Mary coolly. "But I hope it has caught you tight."

"Never fear, my dear," went on Mr. Mordaunt, in the same warmly complimentary tone. "We have to thank you all the same for very efficient assistance, and shall be pleased to remember it whenever you like."

"She is no better than a she-devil; and I'll be even with her yet, mark my words!" Walgate still raged and swore.

"You'll be well quit of him, my dear, for six months or more. If after that he gives you any trouble, why, just come to me. I know what you've been through lately all on his account, and I'm ready to stand your friend."

CHAPTER XI.

IN COOPERS' RENTS.

MARY WALGATE breathed more freely when she was rid of her husband and his captors. But the scene had been terribly agitating, and left her so weak and trembling that she sat inert for ever so long. Then "Mr. Cesar" himself came in, thinking that this smart lady was in the service of the police, and therefore entitled to the utmost attention.

He asked her if she still wished her little refreshment, and on her yielding a half-dazed consent, took the liberty of offering her a glass of good champagne, which, with the juicy filet and fried potatoes, soon restored her strength and courage.

It was such a delightful change for her, the bright, snug little room, with its snow-white napery and silver cutlery and clean glass, after the gloomy prison meals, eaten out of a tin porringer with only a wooden spoon. The food, too, seemed delicious, although a less hungry

and more fastidious client might have found fault with the grease and garlic that soddened and flavoured the *plat*.

Mary ate every mouthful, drank another glass of champagne, ordered black coffee and a glass of liqueur brandy, and felt new life quickening within her. She accepted this prosperous beginning, her fortunate escape from the husband she hated, on the very first day of her release, as a good omen for the future.

It was an auspicious day with her, and being of the superstitious bent not uncommonly seen in women who have been the playthings of mischance, she was anxious to carry out her programme before the luck changed.

The proprietor, Signor Cesare Malamocco, brought her the bill in person with every mark of courteous consideration, which increased to enthusiasm when she added a lordly tip and spoke to him fluently in his beloved native tongue.

"Is there anything more, excellenza?" he asked with the most profound respect. "Command me—I am your slave."

"I should like to look at a London Directory,

that is all ; ” and when she had carefully studied this for half an hour, Mary left the restaurant on foot to make her way straight to Strutton Ground.

She had traced her course upon the map of the London Directory and had been glad to find that this not very aristocratic quarter was a purlieu of Victoria Street, and really quite close at hand.

Coopers' Rents was reached through a narrow entry, and proved to fill one side of a squalid inner court of a small square crowded with children, whose ragged clothes and dirty faces were largely splashed with the prevailing local colour.

They stopped their games amidst the festering garbage, which they were diligently converting into mud pies, to stare at the unaccustomed visitor—the swell lady who was evidently a stranger, and already an object of suspicion to the several frowsy-haired viragoes watching her approach, with arms akimbo and most unfriendly eyes.

Some hostile demonstration would assuredly have been made, and Mary would have been

soon surrounded, hustled, perhaps robbed, and certainly ejected, but that she was now recognised by Sappy Sal, and at once made free of the place.

Her friend had been anxiously awaiting her, wondering, indeed, what delayed her coming; for three hours had elapsed since the morning's discharges, and Mary had promised that her first visit should be to Coopers' Rents.

"I've been hungering for a sight of you, deary. Come along right inside. She's a pal of mine," added Sal to the now admiring spectators, mostly women, "and a regular dona. So speak her fair, and maybe she'll stand treat. Order half a quartern—they'll fetch it—don't you understand? Give 'em two bob, will you? That'll keep them quiet while we're talking, and they'll leave us alone. We don't want no prying into our business, do we, deary, or listening at our door?"

She led the way up a weary number of rickety stairs—for the Rents was a seven-storeyed building raised thus high by a grasping landlord—into an attic room lighted only by cavernous dormer windows.

"I thought I'd be safest right up at the top of the house. It's too high for anyone to get on the roof, and no one much comes up here out of curiosity. But best to make all sure."

And Sal carefully locked and barricaded the door.

"Now, deary, come up near the light and let's have a look at you. My, but you're a sight to do one good! I knew you were 'andsome and tofty-looking. I could see that even in the prison clothes, but there! I never guessed you were such a beauty, such an out-and-out duchess and downright swell. And is them the things I sent you—that brown dress? I hardly know it again.

"Is it the way you wear it or what you've done to it, deary? Anyway, you're good to look at, and I'm a proud woman to have you for a pal."

Sal walked round and round her friend, admiring her from every point of view; and Mary, falling in with her humour, smilingly showed herself off to the best advantage, twisting and turning and moving to and fro with the easy grace of a professional "figure."

"You're fit to be a queen, for any lay, in the highest line. Why, with your 'andsome face and figure, set off with fine feathers, you'd carry all before you; break chaps' hearts and turn their 'eds——"

"They shan't turn mine!" cried Mary bitterly; "no man shall make a fool of me again. I've suffered too much already."

"Stick to that, Mary, my dear. Keep 'em at a distance. Play with 'em if you choose and want to use them, but if you're wise you'll never let any man take your fancy. I suppose it's natural for us poor women to be got the better of. I've been once too often, and pain and anguish it's cost me. Now, your man—'usband, isn't he?—you won't go to him, I don't suppose, after what you've told me, but do you think he'll come after you? It might spoil everything."

With a malicious look of triumph in her eyes and in passionate language Mary described what had just occurred at the Café Malamocco.

"Then you're well quit of him for a spell. He'll get it hot—and before his time's ended you'll have made tracks somewhere, I daresay.

Have you thought at all, deary, what you mean to do?"

"A great deal, Sal. More than I can tell you now, except that I want to go straight if I can. I've got the chance, thanks to you. But we'll talk about that directly—about your future, too, as well as mine. For the moment we have other business in hand, and no more time must be lost in setting about it. The first thing is to realise some of our fortune. You have the jewels safe, I suppose?"

"No fear, my darling. Just wait a bit and you shall see them, every one."

Sal went to the fireplace and put her hand high up the chimney, where she removed a couple of loose bricks, and after a little while produced the parcel that contained the treasure.

It was a small tin box, inside which was an old glove, and inside that several casings of rag and cotton wool. The last contained the precious stones, which Mary Walgate proceeded to examine with the cool, critical eye of a connoisseur.

There were just fifteen of them, all of considerable size and obviously valuable. Three

large diamonds and four smaller ones, all finely cut and of the purest water; two very pretty, rich-coloured rubies; five enormous pearls, one of them a black pearl; and one magnificent emerald, of perfect water and very great size.

The whole were in excellent order; no vestige remained of their settings; and every scrap of gold had been carefully removed, probably to prevent recognition in the first place, and secondly for convenience of secretion.

"I parted with one, you know, deary. I was forced to get you what I promised. It was a diamond—the smallest of them—and I took it to Jedediah Crasta, the fence in Shadrack Alley. Told 'im I'd picked it up routing among the dust heap at Hammersmith, and I was very stout about it, and he 'arf believed me, although he winked his eye, said he knew I was a crook, and he'd 'ave no dealings with me. But he offered me four flimsies, and I got five-and-twenty couters out of him at last. That was £25, you understand."

"Which was about a quarter what it was worth. We'll do better than that, I hope, with the rest," said Mary, fondly fingering the lovely

stones, and holding them to the light one after the other, so as to realise their beauties fully.

"To be sure. I knew that; that's why I arst you to come into the swim. But what do you mean to do, deary?"

"First of all, I must assume my rightful position in the world. As a lady, properly established and recognised, I can dispose of my jewels without question and at my leisure—so as to dispute the price and get what's right, if not from one, from another."

"You *are* a real toff, then?" asked Sal, with more awe than doubt in her voice.

"If you mean a lady, yes, I certainly am. I thought you knew it," said Mary, with superb simplicity. "I will not tell you who and what I am just yet, for it might, perhaps, upset you. I wish to remain friends, close, intimate friends with you, remembering only what I owe you, and entirely putting aside my rank."

"Dear, dear, and to think you should have been through the mill, and that I should have met you there! What orful 'ârd lines for you, but what luck for me!" exclaimed Sal, quite overcome by the strangeness of the situation.

"But there, again we were wasting time. Let's get on. In order to resume my position, or one at least that will explain my having valuable jewellery to sell, I must be able to make a good show. A couple of hundred pounds would more than suffice for that, and I propose that I should get the best possible price for another of the stones. This pearl, say—it's worth more than £200, but not quite £300, I should say. I have never owned many pearls, but I had one once which was not finer than this, and it cost £375."

Sal listened in open-mouthed admiration and astonishment.

"At that rate, the whole of the swag must be worth a big sum," she remarked thoughtfully.

"As I tell you, I have never had a great deal of jewellery, but these stones ought to fetch, properly sold, you understand, something above £8,000."

"And all ours? Why, it's quite a tremendous fortune!"

"I suppose they're ours!" said Mary, with some show of scruple. "I believe, after the

owner, the finder has the best right to property. Perhaps we ought to try and find the owners?"

"Who'd know them after fifty odd years? I never heard their names—not the chaps as Emily Laurence took 'em off—and if we wos to up and talk about our find, why, the prison authorities would say they'd more right to them, or maybe they'd go to the Crown. Findings keepings, I say; and I mean to stick to the swag, whatever you may think and feel, deary. Why—asking your pardon—you talk like a fool."

"As I've told you, I want to go straight. It may be wrong to take these things."

"Don't refuse the luck that's come to you, I say. Why, it's fairly dropped into our mouths."

"Well, at any rate, there's nothing else we can do, so I'll sell this pearl, shall I? so as to make a beginning."

And Mary took up the stone.

"All fair and square, of course? You won't go back on a pal?" said Sally anxiously.

"If you mean that I think of deceiving you, I swear to you I have no such idea. I hope I am incapable of it," said Mary haughtily.

"But if you distrust me, come and see me sell it, and go halves."

"Who am I, to go about with a real dona? Look at me."

Sal had not spent much as yet upon personal adornment.

"Why didn't you get yourself some decent clothes?" asked Mary, a little fretfully.

"It wouldn't run to it, deary. When I'd paid for your new duds and the rest, there wasn't more than a couter left, and I preferred a good square meal or two. I ain't had too many in my late life."

"Yes, yes, I understand. I ought to have been more considerate. But you will be able to smarten up a bit, I hope, and perhaps then——. However, all that will keep. I'll go and sell the pearl and come straight back to you. I'll tell you what I mean then."

CHAPTER XII.

AT MINTER'S HOTEL.

MARY, on regaining Victoria Street, hailed a hansom and was driven to a well-known jeweller's—Jevon's—on Ludgate Hill. She walked into the shop, looking every inch a lady, and asked to see one of the firm.

A civil-spoken, gentlemanlike man who stood behind the counter said he was one of the partners, and asked what he could do for her.

"It is rather a delicate matter—about some jewellery. I am the Princess Pahlovsky."

"Jewellery? I am at your Highness's orders. What may I show you? We have a very large stock."

"Pray let us understand each other. I am not a buyer to-day, but a seller."

She laughed pleasantly.

"I wish to dispose of this pearl."

"Oh, that is another matter. I am afraid——"

"Oh, as you like," replied the Princess, with

immeasurable contempt in her voice and indignation in her fine eyes, as she gathered up her skirts with a haughty gesture and prepared to leave the shop.

"Pardon me, Princess—do not mistake me. Of course, business is business, and I have no objection to—to deal, provided——"

"It's all above board? Is that your meaning? I have told you who I am. I am staying at Minter's Hotel, in the West End, or you may wire to Paris, to the Boulevard Malesherbes, No. 279. But, really, if you make so many difficulties, I had better go elsewhere."

"No, no. I entreat your Highness to forgive me. Will you not show me the stone?"

"There it is. It is continually dropping out of a bracelet, and worries me so that I have resolved to part with it."

The jeweller took up the pearl, turned it over in the light, examining it with the intentness of a practised eye, assisted by a powerful magnifying glass.

"We can offer your Highness £150 for the pearl," he said at length. "It is our last price."

Then commenced a long haggle, an eager

and animated fight, which ended in a deal for £182.

“How will you take the money, Madame la Princesse? In cash? If so, perhaps you will wait while I send round to the bank.”

Eventually Mary re-entered her hansom, with a bundle of crisp new notes in her bag, and twenty-two pounds in gold.

Now that she was amply provided with the sinews of war, she returned to Victoria Street and dismissed her cab. Then she walked on foot to Coopers' Rents.

“I never looked to see you back so soon, deary,” said the astonished Sal. “Nothing wrong, I hope. 'Ave yer disposed of the swag?”

Mary, without speaking, took out the little bundle of notes and the gold.

“All that? Sakes alive! I knew ye'd do the trick to rights. It was a lucky day when I took yer for a pal.”

“Half that—ninety-one pounds—is yours, Sal, and you shall have it if you like, only I think it ought to be treated as capital. I must have enough ready to make a proper show, if

we're to get rid of the rest without danger or loss. Suppose you take only twenty pounds now——”

“Five couters is more'n enough for me,” protested Sal.

“No; twenty pounds you must have. I will tell you why: I am going to a swell hotel—Minter's; I've given it as my address. The jeweller may ask there, so I'd better not delay. But I want you to come to me to-morrow——”

“Me at a swell toffs' 'otel? Never! It'd blow the whole gaff.”

“Not if you make up properly. Tell me, have you ever worn decent clothes? What were you before—before——”

“I dropped into being a prig? Time was, deary, when I held my head high enough. I was once maid to a lady in the country——”

“It's the very thing, Sal. Now you shall be my maid if you don't mind, and only in public, for, of course, in private we shall always be equals and friends. You see, it's better we should be together, for a time at least. You don't altogether trust me? Never mind, Sal.

Why should you? Perhaps I don't trust you——"

"I'm on the square, s' help me, I am."

"I hope and think so, Sal. Still, my proposal is a wise one. Do you agree?"

"If you say so, deary, yes, of course."

"Then do exactly as I tell you. I am now going to buy portmanteaus, dress baskets, dressing-bag—all the outfit that I ought to have. I shall want you to-morrow to join me at my hotel. Do you understand?—neatly dressed, looking the responsible, confidential lady's maid. Can you manage that, eh?"

"Trust me, deary—I should say yer 'Ighness," she made a little curtsy. "You'll find Mrs. Crealoch—that's my right name—give you every satisfaction."

"One other word. How about the jewels? Where had they better be?"

"Wherever we are. I'll bring 'em along to-morrow, or if you like we'll halve them now, afore you go. You can stick to your share."

Mary considered for a moment.

"It might be the best thing to do. Don't think I distrust you, Crealoch—but, after all,

I'd like to look at them, just to touch and handle them; you know I was always foolish over precious stones."

A fair division was now made of the spoil, and Mary hurried away—first to Victoria Station, then, having secured her box, to an outfitter's, where she bought a plaid rug, a neat umbrella and pretty sunshade; next to a portmanteau shop in Piccadilly, where she got a smart dressing-case and a jewel-box with a patent lock; there, too, she ordered three dress-baskets to be ready next day, with her initials newly painted and a princess's coronet above; last of all—it was barely an hour since she had left the jeweller's in Ludgate Hill—to Minter's Hotel; and she arrived there before any reference had been made.

"Can I have rooms?" she asked with lofty condescension. "A nice sitting-room and bedroom, with another for my maid. She will follow to-morrow with the rest of my things. They have gone astray on the line."

"Thank you—quite delightful!" she said pleasantly to the housekeeper, who showed her into a charming suite upon the first floor.

"Please send up my things, and perhaps you will let them pay my cab?"

She produced a well-stocked purse and took out half a sovereign.

"I fear I have no change. Thank you, that will do. Oh, by the way, may I ask them to lock up my jewel box presently in the hotel safe? I have more jewels than I like to leave about. Yes? You are very good, I am sure."

The housekeeper assured her it would, of course, be done, and was leaving the room when she stopped and asked—

"I beg your pardon; what name did you say?"

"Ah, of course," said Mary laughing, "you do not know me. I am the Princess Pahlovsky, but I do not wish it put into the papers, do you see? I am travelling very quietly, *incognita* almost, and shall be going on to Paris in a day or two. I don't want any fuss—no callers or invitations. Of course, if anyone should find me out you will let me know before they are shown up. Thank you so much; you are most kind."

Mary, when left alone, looked around for one

moment with a well-satisfied air, then entered her bedroom, removed her hat, and, after rearranging her glossy hair, paused to examine the beautiful face reflected before her.

"Well, Mary, my dear," she said at length, "you have still some chances in your favour. You have made one false step, but it may not be too late to retrieve it.

"The luck seems to have turned, and you may yet do something, thanks to old Sal. With that face, those brains, and all the other advantages, inherited or acquired, you ought to go far.

"Mary Walgate might not benefit by them much. Let us see what the Princess Marie Pahlowsky can do. It all depends on whether I get a fair field. If I am not dragged back into the mud by that cowardly ruffian who has now to bear his own punishment, I may yet conquer a new and far better position than any I had ever hoped to attain.

"Let me see what cards I hold in my hand."

There was one person in London who had known Mary in the days of her adversity, but

who might be of considerable service to her if only she could win him over to her side. How was General Macintire disposed towards her? He had made no sign since that first interview at Millbank. Mary was half afraid that somebody or something had put him against her, possibly on account of her late prison misconduct.

She would write to him at once. If she could only induce him to come and see her!

After some thought she sent for the "Court Guide," hunted up his address, and indited the following judicious epistle on the hotel note-paper:—

"One who already owes you a deep debt of gratitude appeals to you again.

"Can you, will you, come and see me here? I wish, in the first place, to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your infinite goodness to a much-wronged, suffering woman, and after that to ask one other favour, which, of your great generosity, you will not refuse.

"I am only here for a day or two at most, and may leave to-morrow for the Continent. My friends have behaved most nobly, and have

agreed to receive me without one word of reproach. Although Heaven knows it was not I who was to blame! I can never forget what I have been through; the burthen of the miserable past must always oppress me secretly; but I shall bear it bravely and without a murmur. Courage and resignation may yet bring me some measure of contentment, if not of absolute happiness. We shall see.

"Only I wish, before leaving England, to vindicate myself in your eyes, if I can. I want to explain some things, tell you others, and after that, perhaps, gain your pitying forgiveness, possibly a little of your good-will.

"Do not, I beseech you, refuse me this humble but earnest request. Come as soon as you can.

"I occupy the rooms numbered forty-three in this hotel, but if you ask for me—the Princess Pahlowsky—you will be admitted at once.—NADA."

The special messenger by whom this letter was despatched returned without an answer. General Macintire was out, but expected back in time to dress for dinner. An hour later they

brought her a brief verbal message. He would call a little before seven on his way to his club.

“Ah!” said Mary with a sigh of satisfaction, “I thought he might come; but I shall have my work to do. He is not too friendly now.

“How shall I manage him? Feed him; it’s the best way with men. If I can only get him to stop and dine—and why not? Some men would do much for a *tête-à-tête* dinner with a princess. At any rate, I will be prepared.”

She rang the bell and ordered an exquisite little meal—enough for one would do for two. The table must be laid while she was changing her dress.

This simple process meant, as with most women who wish to look their best, a very careful and elaborate toilette. When she left her bedroom it was as an altogether charming and captivating person, from the soft coronet of glossy chestnut hair to the shiny tips of her infinitesimal toes. She wore the nice little gray evening gown, with its creamy lace trimmings; it fitted her perfectly, and the long, straight,

fashionable skirt gave dignity and distinction to her tall, well-formed figure. Something unseen—expectation, perhaps—gave heightened colour to the peach-bloom of her cheeks. Emotion, sad thoughts or recent tears, made the bright eyes glisten with greater effect.

Although outwardly reserved, she greatly rejoiced when the waiter brought up the General's card.

"General Macintire!" she said, in a tone of much irritation. "Dear, dear; what a nuisance! So I have been discovered already! I cannot see him. Say it is far too late; that I am just going to dine.

"Stay! You can show him up, waiter."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GENERAL ON HIS GUARD.

WHEN the General was introduced the Princess received him with a very distant, stately bow; but directly they were alone together she came across to where he stood, and, with a quick, pretty gesture of welcome, offered him both her hands.

"Oh, how kind you are!" she cried, the tears starting to her eyes. "I hardly dared expect you. May I hope you will sit down? I must not keep you——"

"I have no particular engagement," replied the General stiffly, as he took out and consulted his watch. "I was only on my way to the club."

He did not take the proffered seat, or attempt to remove his overcoat and wrap.

"You have been set against me," she said gently, but with more of sadness than upbraiding. "What is it? Surely I have a right to know?"

"Why do you think that?" he asked a little more graciously.

"Because I never heard of you; you never came to see me again. How utterly wretched and miserable it made me!"

"I was ill for weeks and weeks. When I inquired for you I heard—well, you know what I heard."

"That I had broken out again? That I had become ever so much worse than before? Can you wonder at it? You left me, promising so much—or, at least, I hoped for so much—and then—silence; not one single word, no message, no encouragement, nothing to hope for, think of. I was left alone with my despair. Was it surprising that my madness returned?"

"You had a favour to ask me?" he asked, manifestly anxious to leave this subject. Her words were framed to excuse herself, but her eyes were full of eloquent reproach.

"I had; and I will ask it at once. I can see you are anxious to leave me; and what right have I—a poor wretch whom you dislike and despise—why should I try to detain you?"

The General made a gesture of kindly protest

and, as the best answer to this self-abasement, sat down.

"It is not much, I think, for you to concede, but everything for me to obtain," she went on, still standing before him with her hands nervously clasped together, her willowy form bending down in an attitude of desponding supplication.

"Pray go on," said her visitor, in a more sympathetic, and distinctly encouraging, voice.

"May I beg and entreat you, as a brave, chivalrous gentleman, to respect my secret? Will you promise me, give me your word, that you will never reveal to a soul the humiliating and painful position in which you found me down there?—you know where, but I hate the very name of the place."

"Surely you do not suppose I would dream of such a thing? Did I not promise it faithfully at Mill—— long ago? Far be it from me to take such an unfair advantage of you, or, indeed, of anyone whom mistake, misfortune——"

"The base treachery, rather, of a despicable

scoundrel," interrupted Mary, eager to emphasise the real cause of her imprisonment.

"Well, well, whatever the origin of your trouble, I can assure you I should be the last person to remind you of it. If you are now resolved to lead a new life——"

"I am returning to my old life," she answered loftily, seeming to regain her courage at his continued misconception. "I think I told you that I am about to rejoin my relatives on the Continent. They are people—well, you know my name, and whether or not we have claims to any distinction. It is just that which makes me so anxious you should promise me what I ask."

"I will do so gladly."

"If we meet again—and it is more than probable we shall, in a very different world—will you let me pass by unknown; or at least leave me to be the first to recognise you, as, believe me, I shall certainly wish to do, if I can without danger or inconvenience?"

The General readily gave his assurance, and then asked whether he could be of any further service.

"No," she said coldly; "I have no right to ask you more. When I begged you to call it was in the hope that I might win a little true sympathy, a little commiseration; but I see plainly I can never secure that——"

"Why judge me so harshly? I assure you I have been very truly sorry for you from the first."

"For a moment or two, yes; and I had no right to expect more. And yet—I think, I feel sure—if you knew all my story you would be completely on my side."

"Tell it me, then; I will listen patiently."

"You would need patience; it would take too long, I fear, and you are, I know, anxious to go to your club. Your dinner is waiting. It is cruel to keep you——"

The General laughed pleasantly. "I am not quite a slave to the pleasures of the table, I trust. If it will ease your mind, if you honestly think that a full confession—that is not quite the word I fear—that what you have still to tell me will raise you at all in my estimation, I will forego my dinner without a pang."

"No, no; that would be cruel, and also most unwise," she replied, with a sweet, winning smile. "I could not hope for full sympathy from a hungry man. See, General Macintire," and she pointed to the white cloth and neatly-appointed table, "I have a proposition to make, a bold one, but I will run the risk. Why not stay and dine with me?"

"Oh, really," protested the General, rather taken aback. "I could not venture to trespass on your—I should be intruding——"

"Not in the very least. It would be a charity, even if there was no other reason. I am here, wretched and alone, with miserable thoughts, bitter regrets, and deep forebodings. Take pity on me and stay."

She laid her ungloved hand lightly upon his arm, and looked up into his face with a naïve and very fascinating kind of entreaty. There was something irresistible in this charming creature; just a touch, too, of unconventionality in the situation that gave zest to the offer.

"If you insist, of course, I cannot well refuse, although——," he still seemed to hesitate, but only as a matter of form.

“That is settled, then,” and Mary gaily tripped to the bell; but by way of apology she added, “I cannot pretend to answer for the *chef* or the cuisine, only I have not had too many good dinners lately, and I have ordered the best to be had.

“Waiter, lay a second cover and bring dinner.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A NICE LITTLE DINNER.

THE dinner she had ordered did Mary infinite credit and raised her considerably in the General's opinion. He was not exactly a *bon vivant*, but he had a discriminating taste and he highly approved of the menu.

There must be some good in a woman so thoroughly well versed in the higher flights of the gastronomic art—who could compose so toothsome a repast out of the simplest materials. Oysters, *croute au pot*, salmon, sauce *hollandaise* and new potatoes, lamb cutlets with cucumber, quails and salad, *asperges en branche*, and a green gooseberry tart.

Simple fare enough, to read the dishes one by one—simple, and in full summer fairly cheap and unpretending. But this was the month of March, when early vegetables are scarce and costly, when lamb and salmon had only just come in: the first had been brought from the sunny south, a cold, late spring had made the

lamb very dear, and the salmon was the first in the market.

Mary, too, could talk pleasantly about every dish as it was put on the table in front of her, French fashion, displaying much curious experience.

“Oysters are about the best dish, although the little grey shrimp fresh caught is very delicious, and I perhaps prefer Marennes or Cancale oysters to these,” she said critically, as she did full justice to her half dozen.

“Rank heresy,” replied the General. “There are none to compare with English natives, the American Blue Points alone excepted.”

“Which are admirable, I admit; but the American way of serving them on crushed ice freezes them stone cold and robs them of half their flavour. Just one glass of this Chablis Moutonne?”

“Excellent soup!” the General next remarked heartily.

“I am not so sure;” she would not approve. “They will not use the regular earthenware marmite in this country. Indeed, the thing is disappearing in France. Ah, General, if only

you could have tasted the soups in my old home ! Do you know, I sometimes made them myself. My dear mother declared I had a natural genius for cookery, and actually made me take lessons from our *chef*."

"Indeed. I should very much like to test your skill. A very light hand is wanted for the finest cookery, and a lady's is, of course, the best."

"I could beat this sauce *hollandaise* easily," she asserted gaily.

"It is one of the most difficult things to get good sauce anywhere nowadays."

"Hardly in Paris, except in private houses, and made by the mistress herself. Do you know, General, that the best traditions of French cookery linger still in the out-of-the-way places of which few people hear? Do you know the Pyrenees?"

"Very slightly. I have been to Pau."

"A very short distance up the valley is a little town—Agelès—the *patron* of which is a perfect cook. Commend me to him for choice gastronomy. I shall never forget his omelets. They are a dream."

"You have travelled a great deal apparently. I remember you told me that you had," went on the General, seeking gently to make her talk about herself.

"All over Europe—the best parts, that is to say—the most civilised; the French seaside, the Italian lakes, Vevey, the Riviera, Rome."

"Have you any preference?"

"I think Como is the most ideally beautiful, the most exquisitely enjoyable place I know. I shall certainly go there this autumn after the Engadine. Perhaps I may see you?"

"It would be something to look forward to," said the General gallantly. "Where do you propose to stay? Bellagio, Menaggio, Cadenabbia—where?"

"I shall try to persuade my mother to take a villa on the Cadenabbia side. If she won't, we should be at the Hotel B——, I suppose. At any rate, you would hear of us there; that is, if you cared to do so."

"And you permitted it," he corrected her pointedly, recalling her to the urgent appeal she had made him not to recognise her.

"I should be deeply grieved if anything

prevented it; but nothing shall if only I am allowed to——”

She lapsed into sorrowful silence. The conversation had revived unpleasant thoughts.

“Do you know Paris well?” presently asked the General, by way of winning her back to lighter things.

“Do I know Paris?” she laughed at once, as though the very name was joy. “Paris, oh, yes; I know it well. There is no place like it. I have been there a dozen times, from my childhood up. My mother lives there now, and I am going to join her to-morrow.”

“She is alive then? And your father also?”

“No; alas, alas! he died some years ago. If only he had lived till——”

She sighed deeply and pushed away her plate.

“Please have patience, my dear friend. Do not ask me more just now; I should only spoil your dinner and perhaps break down.”

The tears were already in her eyes.

But at last the coffee was brought, liqueurs and cigars. Mary gave full permission to smoke,

and, indeed, showed the example, taking just three whiffs of a scented cigarette, which she lighted with a pretty gesture that was half apology and half reckless resolve to have her way.

"We Russians all do it," she said; "it is the best digestive, and gives an extraordinary flavour to coffee. But there," and after waving off the fine spirals of smoke which she had breathed out through her nostrils, she threw the cigarette gracefully away.

"Make yourself quite comfortable, General, I beg," she said, as she dragged up an armchair, then seated herself on the sofa, put her feet on a footstool, her elbows on her knees, her chin on her clasped hands, and gazed long and silently into the embers of the dying fire.

"With the latter part of my story and the last awful catastrophe you are already acquainted," she said at length, talking more to herself than to her companion. "I told you of my marriage—it was an elopement, indeed—of my short sojourn in the great cities, living the life of luxury and splendour to which I was born, and then of the terrible Nemesis that

overtook me in the end. But I said nothing much of myself, still less of my people, of my birth, parentage, and belongings.

“My father, Serge Dimitri Pahlowsky, was the fourteenth prince of the name. He was the firstborn, and should have succeeded to the family honours, the broad estates, whole villages, and thousands of ‘souls,’ but he became mixed up in one of the eternal conspiracies afloat in that down-trodden land, and fled for his life.

“In his travels he found himself at Cadiz, where my grandfather was English Vice-Consul, and where my mother, his only child, was in the full bloom of youth and incomparable beauty. She took after her father and mother: one was a very handsome man, the other famed for her good looks even in southern Spain.”

“I have always heard—indeed, I know from my own observation—that the mixture of English and Spanish types produces remarkable beauty,” observed the General.

“No doubt it was so with us,” said Mary, accepting the compliment as a matter of course. “The first sight of my mother was fatal to the prince’s peace of mind. He fell deeply, madly

in love with her, married her almost immediately, without the knowledge—much less the consent—of his parents in Russia.

“The news did not reach them for several years; and in the meantime they made my father an ample allowance. Upon this we must have lived in great comfort, if not affluence, for I can remember nothing in my early days that meant poverty or straitened means.

“We travelled much, lodged always in fine apartments, had carriages and horses; I was dressed up and petted, as a darling child is by parents who dote upon her. My education was not neglected, as I think you must allow, and the rosiest future seemed in store for the little princess.

“The blow came when the old Prince Pahlowsky died and my father found himself disinherited. He could not be robbed of his title nor of a small personal fortune, but from superfluity he dropped to a bare sufficiency, and this, too, when he was too old to attempt to add to his means by any honourable employment. Soon after that we lost him; my dear mother was left alone with her sorrow.

"It was sad enough to lose her beloved, but her grief was embittered by the reflection that his passion for her had robbed him of his birth-right. The Pahllovskys could not disown us," said Mary, proudly lifting her head. "My mother was the true and lawful wife of Prince Serge, but his family have never properly acknowledged our claims to be received by them; although we belong to the eldest branch, and I, as my father's child, should possess a large proportion of his property. We are treated as poor relations, and, beyond the small income nothing can deprive us of, have never accepted, or, indeed, asked their help. We would scorn to take it.

"My mother and I were all in all to each other; I lived only to soothe and share her sorrow; she was always gentle, uncomplaining, and ever foolishly affectionate. I repaid her by the basest ingratitude and desertion."

The tears now burst forth, and hiding her face in her hands Mary sobbed bitterly.

"Your marriage displeased her?" the General asked at length, anxious to bring her back to her story.

“Nothing could have displeased her but the one wicked thing I did, and that was to leave her. And now she forgives me without a single word of upbraiding.”

“It was your husband who tempted you away?”

“Yes, the honey-tongued villain, for his own purposes, as you know. We met him at Biarritz when the season was at its height. That pretty watering-place is a great favourite with Spaniards, as perhaps you know, and we were there surrounded by friends, *fêted*, and made much of on every side.

“Among the few English visitors was one who was very much in evidence—Mr. Hugo Walgate he called himself, a well-dressed, aristocratic Englishman (as I thought), and I was flattered by the marked attention he paid me. Ere long I believed I loved him, and was ready to follow him to the uttermost ends of the earth. The rest you know.”

There was a short silence, which the General broke first by asking—

“What has become of him? Have you any idea?”

"He is now in custody, I am pleased to say, and will shortly be where the cowardly brute sent me," said Mary, with concentrated bitterness. "I have done with him."

"But on his release he may again claim you; he will give you trouble."

"I intend to sue for a divorce directly I get to Paris. I can get it at once under French law, and we were married in France. You would not advise otherwise?"

"Oh, dear no! At least, I mean that—I should be really sorry to advise you in so serious and so delicate a matter. But if there is anything else I can do, if my support and countenance can be of service to you, now or hereafter, you will not hesitate to apply to me? You know my address?"

"A thousand million thanks, my dear, kind, good friend," said Mary, in a soft, tremulous voice which she seemed hardly able to control.

Once again she took his hand and kissed it with humble reverence, but with rather intoxicating fervour.

There was an increasingly dangerous fascination in this pretty, winning creature; a subtle

perfume floated around her, she exercised a strange attraction which proved irresistible as she raised the drooping lids of her tear-dimmed eyes and showed them in their half-veiled radiance, mysterious, unfathomable.

They still stood hand in hand, when the General, yielding to a no doubt friendly, fatherly impulse, drew her nearer to him and imprinted one harmless kiss upon her snow-white brow.

Then, as though quite ashamed of himself, he hurried away.

She waited till she heard the last of his retreating footsteps, then closed the door and proceeded to express her exuberant satisfaction by dropping a low curtsey to herself in the long mirror and then pirouetting before it in a gay, impromptu dance.

"Caught! I have got him tight; in the sack or bag, or whatever my friend Sal would call it. He is my devoted slave, I hope, to be used just as I please. What shall I do with him? Marry him? No, Mary, my dear, hardly that. He is a nice old thing, but oh! so old. I can do better, surely. But we shall see.

“Meantime he shall be my godfather. He shall introduce me, answer for me, sacrifice himself for me if ever I should want it and call upon him. I think I can turn him round my finger. Where I lead he will follow, and that shall be to Paris—to-morrow—directly I can get away.

“I’ll write and ask him to see me off. He’ll be pleased with the attention.”

CHAPTER XV.

A BARGAIN AND A DISCOVERY.

MARY awoke betimes next morning, at the usual prison hour of 6 a.m. The habit had become established and was not to be shaken off in a night; but she knew now that she was not obliged to leave the delicious downy bed, so different from the thin mattress at Millbank, which had seemed but a sheet of paper between her delicate limbs and the hard planks beneath.

Her waking thoughts were as pleasant as her couch was luxurious. Life looked all rosy his spring morning, as fair as the dawn which flushed the sky when she drew back her curtains and lay gazing at it dreamily. A good night's rest had made her feel so well, so strong, so capable of going straight forward on the road she had marked out for herself.

An hour or two of careful self-communing followed; then she rang for her bath and early cup of tea, and began a delightful dawdle over

her morning toilette. She had not had much time allowed her of late for dressing.

It was joy to her to handle and arrange her splendid hair, which in prison had perforce been accomplished with a small-tooth comb; a pleasure to gaze at her charming features in an excellent glass—there were no mirrors in Millbank.

Nor was there anything to hinder or hasten her here. She might spend hours, if so disposed, in admiring herself, noting all her best points, and they were many: the dazzling whiteness of her shoulders, the glistening enamel of her pearly teeth, the witchery of her bright eyes, every trick and turn of which she knew. One thing alone distressed her.

Her hands, to her great chagrin, had suffered. The constant needlework and other menial employments had been hard on the fine, supple fingers, on the filbert-shaped nails, on the soft, velvety texture of the skin.

But, on the whole, she was pleased. If anything, she had improved, physically, during her imprisonment.

The Princess Marie Pahlowsky, *alias* Mary

Walgate, had come to the same conclusion as many with wider experience.

It is, no doubt, a fact that gaol discipline, with its well-regulated hours, its abstemious and wholesome dietary, its steady labour and complete relief from all external worries, is distinctly beneficial to health.

The day may come when eminent doctors will prescribe a term of imprisonment as the best restorative for exhausted nature and shattered nerves.

At 10 a.m. the Princess made an ample breakfast. Then came the *coiffeur*, while she read in a morning paper a full account of the arrest and committal of her husband, the great hotel thief. After that a "manicure," a little lady who spent much time and lamentations over the Princess's hands, injured by exposure to frost in her Russian home; and, last of all, the page boy announced—

"Her 'Ighness's maid."

Crealoch was transformed. A smart black silk dress and a neat bonnet of black straw had changed the old gaol-bird into a respectable middle-aged woman. There might be deep

markings upon the lined and rugged features, but these, with the silvered hair and subdued manner, spoke rather of advancing age than of the storms and shipwrecks of an illspent life.

"We shall go on to Paris this afternoon, Crealoch, unless you have anything to say against it?"

"Me, mum—yer 'Ighness, I should say—not at all. Whatever you says is best, I'm sure."

"I have many reasons—good reasons. We shall dispose of the stones better on the Continent—in Paris, Brussels, perhaps Berlin and Vienna. So ring the bell.

"Have places secured for us in the club train this afternoon," she said to the waiter who came in. "And if anyone calls from Jesurum's, in Bond Street, show him up."

"I am expecting a man from the jeweller's," she explained to Crealoch. "It will be best to increase our store at once, and I believe single stones are easily sold in this country. So I picked out Jesurum's (they are big people, and quite handy—in Bond Street, you know), and begged them to call or send a responsible representative."

The man who presently appeared on behalf of Messrs. Jesurum proved to be a tall, handsome, very venerable-looking old Jew.

He must have been of great age—close on eighty at least. With his yellow, parchment-like skin all drawn and shrivelled, his faded, filmy, almost sightless eyes, his long and silky snow-white beard, he looked like a patriarch, a very venerable old man. His manner was grave and dignified, although he was most polite—obsequious even—in his address.

“Your Highness wishes to dispose of a valuable diamond?” he began.

“If I can get a fair price for it—yes.”

“It is our business to buy stones. Our price is always fair, from our own point of view; but I give no more than I can help, as you will understand. May I see it?”

Mary handed him one of the largest and best of their collection, and watched him as it lay in his palm, while he bent his magnifying-glass upon it, examining it closely.

All at once, with sudden, uncontrollable emotion, he staggered back, and but for a chair that Mrs. Crealoch quickly placed for him would

have fallen to the ground. His one hand had closed over the diamond; with the other he steadied himself in his seat.

For some minutes he sat there, numbed and helpless, a pitiable object; then, partly recovering his self-possession, he spoke in faint but earnest accents.

“Your Highness will pardon me. I fancied—I must have been mistaken—but I fancied that I recognised this stone. Has it any history? Where and when did Madame la Princesse become possessed of it?”

“History? None that I know of. It was given me some years ago by my dear father, in a bracelet; but the setting will not hold well. I am afraid of losing it, and so I thought——. It is a very valuable stone.”

“It is worth money,” said the Jew, with a deep sigh. “Once it was worth more than money to me. It cost me peace, happiness, future, my life almost and that of those dearest to me—it and others. For I could swear to it anywhere,” he said with marked emphasis, as he again pored over the jewel.

"You think, then, that you have seen it before?"

"Lady, that diamond and many others were stolen from me—forgive me, Highness, I make no imputations—but I was robbed of it, believe me, by someone quite fifty years ago.

"The circumstances of the theft do not concern and will not interest you, but to me they are among the most painful memories of my long life. I was a young man then, beginning life and doing well. I had a small share in a great business, and looked to certain fortune.

"I lost it all at one stroke. My little capital barely sufficed to make up the serious loss which my misfortune brought upon our firm. I was all but ruined; in fifty-odd years I have never regained the ground I lost. I am still a subordinate instead of principal, and poverty has been the portion of all who bear my name. All through that robbery—that cruel, cowardly theft!"

He buried his head in his hands and for a time spoke no word; but he recovered himself brusquely.

"This is not business," he said with a fresh effort. "You wish to sell that stone? Well, I will give you five hundred pounds for it."

Mary laughed aloud.

"It is ridiculous. I want at least double that sum."

"By the God of my fathers, five hundred pounds is all it is worth. It is my last price. But for the memories it arouses I would not give so much. I am a weak old man and at the end of my days, but I want to recover one stone at least and take it back to our firm."

The old man was inclined to turn his recent emotion to good account.

"Five hundred pounds! It is mere foolishness to offer no more. I must have one thousand pounds," Mary insisted.

"That is out of the question. I could not give it—not for this single stone. But if your Highness could throw in one or two more—have you any other diamonds, or pearls, or other gems you would sell? We might make a better price for the lot."

He spoke carelessly, and his bleared old eyes were downcast, still riveted on the stone. Yet

she seemed to see some hidden snare in the question.

"No, that is the only jewel I have to sell, and even that I am not anxious to part with, especially as you will not give me what I expect."

"I will give you eight hundred pounds. That is my last word, Highness."

"Then put it back in the jewel-box, Crea-loch," said the Princess. "I will keep it a little longer, or I may get the fastening improved. I need not keep you, Mr.—Lewis."

"Let us say £850, Highness."

He could not turn his back on the deal.

"It is too much, but I have my reasons for wanting that stone."

"And they will cost you a thousand pounds," replied Mary, with a laugh. "But, there, we cannot agree; why waste words?"

The old Jew looked lovingly at the stone. It was easy to see the struggle within his soul. He wanted it badly. But a thousand pounds left him no sufficient margin of profit.

He still haggled and fought; £875, £890, £900, £950, and eventually the transaction was

completed at the last-named price. Mr. Lewis was to go to his bank and return at once with notes for the amount arranged.

Directly the jeweller had left the room the two partners exchanged looks and uttered a simultaneous cry.

"A close thing," said the Princess.

"Does he suspect anything? Has he gone for the coppers?" asked Crealoch.

"No. Whatever he may suspect, he wants the stone, and he gets it cheap. He may, perhaps, mean mischief afterwards. I did not like his asking if I had any more. Did you hear him?"

"Why, surely I did. I shivered. But you were a match for him, and would be for the best of 'em. What next?"

"That's what I am not clear about. It depends much on this old man—his ways, looks, and so forth—when he returns. But it was an extraordinary mischance. That man has no right to be alive."

"He must be near a hundred! The very jeweller that Emily Laurence hocussed fifty years ago. And to think that he should remember a bit of glass for all that time!"

"They have their private marks, only visible under the magnifier. He'd have known them all if I'd shown them."

"And if he had? What better right has he to them than we have? Findings is keepings, *I* say."

"It was hard upon him, too," mused Mary, whose conscience pricked her sore at memory of the old man's distress. "After all, they really are his, not ours, Crealoch. We ought, in common honesty, to restore them now we've found the rightful owners. I fear they will bring us no good."

Mrs. Crealoch could not conceal her indignation and contempt.

"Why, it makes me sick to hear you talk! If you say such a thing again, I'll just take my share of the swag and walk away."

"Conscience, conscience! *La Muette*, the silent one, they call it in French slang. It is far too talkative, as I find it, to please me. What will be the end of it all?"

CHAPTER XVI.

AN AMERICAN CRÆSUS.

THE old jeweller brought the cash in crisp new Bank of England notes, and handed them across to the Princess with one hand, receiving the stone with the other.

"*Donnant, donnant*, fair exchange," she said, smilingly.

"Business is business," he answered gravely. "I must now ask madame's address. It is a mere matter of form. Your Highness resides——?"

"Chiefly in Paris—the Boulevard Malesherbes, No. 279. I am returning to Paris this afternoon by the club train. But my family is Russian, as your are, perhaps, aware."

"Naturally. The name of Pahlovsky is well known to me. To which branch of the family does your Highness belong?"

"My father was Prince Serge. He was exiled in 187—"

Mr. Lewis nodded.

"I know. I was at St. Petersburg on business about that time. Is the Prince still alive?"

"Alas, no! He never returned to Russia, but died in Paris quite prematurely. It was a great blow to us—to my darling mother and myself. We have had but little happiness."

"Madame is beautiful. She will marry—why not? It is your right. Or perhaps you have a husband already. Pardon my presumption. I have no right to talk of these things."

His manner was humbly apologetic, and yet his old eyes searched Mary through and through. Mary saw and interpreted his glance with inward misgiving.

"He suspects us, Crealoch," she said, after the Jew had gone. "I feel sure we must be very careful what we are at. I wish—I wish—I should so like to do the right thing."

"But you can't, then; 'cos I won't let you, there." Crealoch was furious at first; then she changed her tack and became coaxing. "Come, deary, don't weaken now, when you've done so splendidly, and you've only got to keep on as

we've begun. He'll precious soon be in his grave—that old mummy. He won't trouble us much; he hasn't got the time."

But he was full of guile, this aged Jew, who had just come upon the long-lost valuables of his firm; and even while Crealoch was preaching comfort upstairs, he was giving minute instructions to someone who waited for him at the door of the hotel.

"Walk away with me, Issachar, my son, and we will talk as we go along. Is she straight? I have my doubts, and yet I could not say. But you shall watch her, Issachar. Stick to her like a shadow, from now till doomsday, whatever it costs. They are leaving by the club train for Paris; you must go too. Don't let her out of your sight. Where she goes, you go. See all she does and what she does, and whom she knows. But, chief of all, look out for any dealings with our people or others in the trade. If she does, I have taught you the trick of identification. Get to see the jewel, and examine it for the private mark. Here are £10. Use it as it may be necessary, but do not be wasteful. Gold is hard to gain."

So when the Princess reached Charing Cross Station, with her brand-new baggage and her middle-aged maid, there were more people than she knew of to take interest in her proceedings. General Macintire was there, as she had hoped and expected, but so also was Issachar Lewis—a slimy, slipshod little Jew, with restless, blood-shot, and protruding eyes, rather shabbily dressed in a shapeless Tyrolean hat and a large-patterned long ulster with a cape to it.

“Sacred Jeroboam! She is a snorter! I shan’t forget her easily,” he said, smacking his thick lips with satisfaction, as he noted her great good looks and queenly air. “But I wish she wasn’t quite so high-toned. There ain’t nothing but ‘firsts’ on this club train, and an extra fare besides. It’ll come pretty costly, and grandpa’s none too liberal with his beggarly ten quid. If I could only make out where she’ll stop in Paris, I might take a ‘second’ in the night mail to-night and pick her up there to-morrow. That would save a matter of three pounds, and I could charge the whole amount to grandfather all the same. I’ll try and make out the address from her baggage.”

As he loafed around the piles of portmanteaus waiting to be registered he was observed by two people. One—a plainly-dressed, respectable-looking man—spoke to him at once.

“Halloa, Issachar! How’s your grandfather? What brings you this way? Business?”

“Got to shadow *her*, Mr. Mordaunt,” said the little Jew, chucking his thumb over his shoulder towards the Princess. He was proud to be recognised by the great detective from Scotland Yard.

“What will you give me to tell you all about her?”

“Stow larks, Mr. Mordaunt. Do you really know the Princess?”

“Princess! Is that what she calls herself? Fine princess! I only know her as Walgate. She came out of Millbank yesterday. Not a bad sort, all the same. It’s her man; he’s the bad lot. We’ve just took him, and he’s likely to get six months or a year.”

“Thank ye. Granddad will be glad to know all about it. You’ll tell him some day? But I’ve got to keep my eye on her, so ta-ta.”

He sidled up a little nearer to the baggage, but the heavy pieces had been wheeled away, and Crealoch stood guard over the wraps and rugs. With the quickness of one often wanted, she had "spotted" him at once, and at the same time recognised the noted police-officer with whom he had exchanged greetings.

"Mind, mum," she whispered to her mistress, whom she now rejoined where she stood by the train, chatting pleasantly to General Macintire. "That chap's shadowing us. He's in with the detectives."

Mary took it in instantly, and with quick distrust altered the purport of a sentence she was just about to utter.

"My address in Paris? Surely I told you? I shall go in the first instance to an hotel—the Hôtel de Bâle, on the Boulevards. But I shall only remain there till my establishment is complete. I shall hope to see you in Paris before long. My dear mother will be so charmed to know and to thank you on my behalf."

"Yes, yes I shall certainly go over, now or later—perhaps in the early autumn, on my way to the Engadine."

"How are you, General? Off to Paris, eh? Wise man." It was the voice of someone passing.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Vansittart?" replied the General. "No, I'm not going myself, only seeing some friends off." Then he added to Mary, "They're all alike, these rich Americans. Think there's no place like Paris."

Vansittart—Vansittart! Mary had heard the name before as that of a young man of colossal wealth, and quickly a half-formed project darted through her busy, scheming brain.

"How I do wish you were coming, my dear General," she said plaintively. "I do so hate travelling alone. I'm not accustomed to it."

"Surely you're not nervous? But I think I can understand. Perhaps you would like an escort. Shall I put you under charge of my American friend? He is a pleasant, gentlemanly fellow."

"It would be too much of an infliction for him," protested the Princess.

"He won't think it that, unless I'm much mistaken;" and the General, without another

word, passed up to where Mr. Vansittart stood at the door of a compartment.

"Ha! General, you're in luck," said the American gaily. "I admire your taste. Who's your friend?"

"That lady? A Russian—Princess Pahlowsky. May I introduce you? I was going to ask you as a great favour——"

"To look after her on the way across? Why, certainly. I guess I haven't seen a brighter creature for many a day!"

Mr. Vansittart made his bow, and was very graciously received. A few minutes more, and his belongings were transferred to the Pullman carriage where Mary sat almost alone, and the new acquaintances were travelling on in delightful *tête-à-tête* to Paris.

Atchison Vansittart was an excellent specimen of the young cosmopolitan American—the man who works as hard at business as at pleasure, and gets full value out of both. He had inherited a fine fortune, which he had largely increased by judicious manipulation "on the street," and which now went rolling on like a snowball—growing, growing, without any

further effort of his own. He found it harder to spend his money than to make it. Although he could be extravagant, profuse on occasion, had owned a stately yacht, tried racing, bought a Scottish deer forest, coquetted with play, owned a London newspaper, and thrown large sums into the laps of venal harpies of every nationality, his millions hardly diminished much. Now he was drifting aimlessly to Paris, with no sanguine hope of finding a new sensation, but content to while away a few weeks in the gay city at its best season, when the acacias are in full bloom under the brilliant sun.

He was a slight, slim man, between thirty and forty, rather dark-skinned, with fine brown eyes and very white teeth; dressed neatly, but quite without pretension, in a suit of dark-blue serge; but his boots and his gloves were perfect, and he was, no doubt, proud of the smallness of his feet and hands.

There was not a trace of accent in his talk. If anything, his accent would have been called "English" in his own country, and was the result of his education at Harrow and Oxford.

"I should never have taken you for an

American," Mary said presently, after they had chatted for half an hour on commonplace things.

"Am I to consider that a compliment? Perhaps I am the first you have seen?" laughed Mr. Vansittart. "What did you expect? A man covered with revolvers and bowie knives, who chewed tobacco and swore?"

"Don't. I have met lots of Americans, but you are quite different."

"On which side is the balance—for or against me?"

"That you must find out for yourself by-and-by, when we know each other better, if ever we do," said Mary demurely; but there was a ring of challenge in her soft voice and half-veiled, languorous eyes.

"I trust I may be permitted to call on you in Paris, Princess?" said Mr. Vansittart earnestly, "to continue our acquaintance—at least until you have decided whether I am better or worse—than my countrymen."

"And if I find you worse?" Mary asked merrily, without answering the suggestion of a call.

"Don't let us anticipate anything so dreadful. But it will not be my fault. I shall be on my best behaviour."

"Americans always are with us," she said gravely. "What I like about them especially is their chivalry towards women. They are models to the whole world in that respect."

It was sweet flattery. Just the sort to take Mr. Vansittart, and only one of many pretty speeches, demure yet coquettish, harmless yet provocative, which, in her soft dulcet voice, and with the glamour of her charming presence, went a long way towards interesting, even subjugating, her companion.

She was quite delightful, Mr. Vansittart thought, as he looked and listened, admiring the pretty pose of her graceful head, her soft eyes, her rebellious chestnut hair, the curves of her lissome figure, as she lounged back languidly in her chair, with one small foot outstretched in its tiny shoe. She talked so brightly, knew so much, had been in so many places, was so gracious, and yet so modest and self-possessed, her manners were so perfect, this admirable, adorable Princess, that Mr. Vansittart felt he

was in good luck, and was quite dejected as the pleasant journey approached its end.

"Surely this is not good-bye, Princess?" he said, as he held her hand at the door of the omnibus which was to take her to her hotel.

"Do you really wish to see me again? We are very quiet, unpretending people, my mother and I—two poor lone women."

"And I am a poor lone man. Take pity on me."

"I am going now to the Hotel Comfortable for the night, till I can join my mother. What is your address? I will write you when we are settled in Paris—to-morrow or the day after—and offer you a cup of real caravan tea, whenever you like to come for it. Now adieu! and thank you—thank you so much for all your care, you good Samaritan—I mean American. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XVII.

MARY'S MOTHER.

MARY had chosen the Hotel Comfortable because it was one of the newest and largest in Paris. She wished to escape observation, and knew that she was most certain of that when in a crowd.

No one noticed her early next morning when she went out in her plainest attire, alone. Her very first visit, now that trouble seemed fading away behind, and prosperity, possibly the most brilliant future, dawning for her, was to seek out her mother, who was residing in Paris, under conditions that it was painful to her daughter to consider. It must be understood that Mary Walgate still cherished in a very warm corner of her heart the poor old woman whose deep affection she knew she had but ill requited.

Now she called a cab for herself. There was no occasion to tell anyone whither she was bound, not even Crealoch. The maid was best at the hotel, where the treasure was. Besides, it was as well not to let Crealoch into the secret

of the present indigence of the elder princess. It would be time enough to bring her mother and the maid together when the latter was able to assume her proper position in her daughter's establishment.

The cab—an open *fiacre*—drove along the Boulevards in obedience to Mary's orders; then turned off, as directed, and made by the Faubourg Poissonnière for the hill of Montmartre. It was in this rather dingy quarter that Mary's mother occupied a single room near the roof in a very tall, black-fronted house in the Rue Mazagran. All the approaches and surroundings were squalid, the pavement was deep in filth, the gutters choked with refuse, ragged roughts in greasy silk caps chaffed the slovenly women in sabots, who clattered about, wrangling fiercely with the costermongers and sellers of stale fish, who brought their barrows to their customers' doors.

"You will wait for me, *cocher*?" Mary asked sweetly, feeling that it would not be easy to find another cab in these wild regions.

"Willingly, *ma princesse*." It was only his affability; but at first she thought he knew

her, and she started in surprise. "But you will pay me a little on account? These houses have two doors; and you might go out on the other side."

She satisfied him; then made her way to the low, dark den of the concierge and asked for Madame Dufour.

"Mère Chouette? Fourth floor; last door on the left." And Mary began to climb a steep staircase which wound up and up, dark and damp as the shaft of a coal-mine; but there was no bucket or lift to help in the ascent, and Mary was nearly breathless when she reached her mother's door.

Madame Dufour, Mère Chouette, the Princess Serge Pahlovsky—call her what we may—opened the door in person. She was a tall old woman, rather bent in figure, wearing the close-fitting white mob-cap and common blue jean dress of a simple workwoman. Her first set phrase of inquiry, "What does madame require?" gave place to a shrill cry of delighted welcome when she recognised her visitor.

"Marie! Nada! my child! Heaven be thanked! I see you once again."

She spoke in pure, perfect English, but her voice was half choked with emotion as she led her daughter into her little apartment, and, with happy tears and joyful interjections, bent over and fondled her—the prodigal returned.

“I never thought to see you again, darling. I feared the worst. Not a word, not a sign all these weary, weary months. I felt deserted indeed. For, before that, although we had parted, quarrelled——”

“Not quarrelled, dearest—never that. I was wild, wicked, ungrateful; but I have never, never ceased to love you, darling mother.”

“Then why this long silence? Why have you never written since last year?”

“I could not, mother. I had good reasons. You shall hear it all presently; only let me tell you my good news first. Cheer up, dearest little mother. I am back with you now for good and all. There are happier times in store for us both. I have come to take you away from all this.” She waved her hand contemptuously around.

It was a very poor and barely furnished attic room, with a dormer window and angle beams.

But it was scrupulously clean. Through the open casement there was a vista of innumerable roofs and chimney-pots, but a flowering shrub stood on the window-ledge, and one crimson blossom crossed the blue of the sky. Snowy curtains shrouded the narrow stretcher bed in one corner; in another corner was the small charcoal stove that served as kitchen for this poverty-stricken princess. Close up, under the strongest light, was a plain deal table, and on it rested a tambour, or old-fashioned circular frame, across which was stretched a beautiful and delicate piece of embroidery.

"No more of this," went on Mary, pointing with loathing to the embroidery.

"Do not abuse it, child. It has long been my good friend. My best—perhaps I thought it—when you were gone, and I had to depend upon myself alone."

"Mother, it kills me to hear your reproaches. I ought never, never to have left you. But I would still have made your life comfortable. You know I wished it. I offered still to help you—to give you anything I had."

"That man's! Never! I would have died

sooner than be beholden to such a villain! For he was—I am certain he was, or is—but you would not believe it.”

“I am wiser now, mother. You need not upbraid me. Nothing you can say against him can be half as strong as what I feel. I shall never see or speak to him again.”

“Where is he?”

“In gaol—where he sent me,” said Mary shortly.

“My darling child in gaol! What you must have suffered!” The tender-hearted mother thought rather of her child’s affliction than of the disgrace.

“No matter. I have done with him—denounced, discarded him. I will apply at once for a divorce.”

“Heaven knows I wish you to be freed from such a wretch. But are you certain you will get it? Has he no hold on you, or over you? I am so much in the dark. I do not know what has happened.”

“Listen, mother. You shall hear the whole shameful story.” And Mary proceeded to describe all that had happened to her, from her

runaway marriage to her arrest and committal to Millbank.

Her mother heard her out with patience and resignation, pitying sympathy overriding every other emotion.

"And now, my foolish, but much-wronged child, what next? What is this better news?"

"You would have the worst first. Now for the best. Brighter days are dawning. I have had a great stroke of luck—in gaol, where I least expected it. I shall not enjoy it unless you share it with me, dear."

Mary now passed on to her discovery of the jewels, glossing over details, such as the misconduct which had gained her access to the punishment cell, and her close alliance with the habitual criminal who had equal claim with her to the treasure. She never whispered a suggestion that she had come upon the real owners of the property, any mention of which would have set her mother entirely against her proposals.

As it was, the old lady said, stiffly and ungraciously—

"I do not like it, Nada." There was a look of grave disquietude and honest disapproval

which brightened and beautified the poor old creature's pinched and withered face. "The jewellers who were robbed might be found, or they have heirs, descendants. You should seek them out, or let the Government do so. Restore what was lost. You would be rewarded amply."

Mary laughed the suggestion to scorn.

"Reward! A ten-pound note, or even a hundred pounds! What would that be compared to the thousands the jewels are worth?"

"They are not yours. The whole essence of the thing is there. They will bring nothing but evil, mark my words. Dishonesty never pays. These jewels will prove a curse to you yet."

"So you will not share in my success?" went on Mary, ignoring her mother's arguments. "Mother, dear, at least do not refuse to come and live with me. Let us be together once more, as in the old days."

"How shall you live, Nada? On the proceeds of the sale of these jewels? How can I consent to that? It is just that which I hate. I would rather earn my few francs a day at my tambour here."

"Cannot you trust me, mother? I have views, hopes, a certainty almost of happiness in store, and not far off. But I cannot do without you, darling."

"Is that affection only, Nada?" asked her mother sadly. "Am I not necessary to you? Am I not wanted to play some part in your new plans?—as chaperon, sheep dog, natural protector?"

"And who else is my natural protector?" asked Mary, not without a slight blush of consciousness. "Who else, now that I have broken with the husband I loathe? Mother, darling, come. You cannot know what I mean to do for you. You shall hold your head high, as a truly great lady—a real princess. That is my ambition, dearest mother."

"You have no ambition for yourself, I suppose," said the old woman drily. "But, there, it is ungracious for me to impute motives, and I cannot reject your affection. It is too precious to me. I have hungered for it too long and for you."

"And you will come away with me at once? From this wretched garret?"

"Yes. Some time to-day or to-morrow, when I am in more suitable guise, when I cannot be a drag and a disgrace, I will go where you like, with you and for you. I surrender my scruples—Heaven forgive me—although I cannot silence them. Only one thing. Promise me—promise me that you will make restitution, if ever you can."

"I promise, mother, darling," said Mary lightly, as she danced joyfully round the garret-room, quite oblivious to the fact that her promise, if she were so minded, could be easily fulfilled. "But now—there is my purse: help yourself. Fit yourself out as the Princess Serge, only be quick; and this afternoon I will come to you and take you to my hotel."

The old lady sighed as she consented. It seemed to her frank, upright nature that she had become an accomplice in some dark and dishonest deed. Her love for the sweet daughter who had kissed her so gratefully on both cheeks hardly made up for the loss of her self-respect.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DANGER SIGNAL AGAIN.

MARY drove away from the Rue Mazagran in a very joyful mood. The best trait in her rather complex character was her love for the one parent left her, and her sharpest sorrow through all her recent troubles had been repining for her cruel abandonment of her mother, who till then had been her constant care. For her mother's support she had worked hard, willingly taking home her small earnings as a saleswoman in a modiste's to eke out their narrow means.

One day a small prize won in a lottery provided funds for the bold campaign at Biarritz which had ended so disastrously in her elopement with Walgate. Ambition was her curse. Mary was mad to regain the position early eclipsed in the wretched poverty which had been their portion since her father's death, for that part of her story, as told General Macintire, was exactly true. Her father was undoubtedly of the Pahlovsky family, and her mother by

marriage became the Princess Serge. There was no sham in the pretence they set up at Biarritz, except that they were really without substantial means. Mary hoped everything from a brilliant marriage, and it had ended as we know.

Now once more fortune smiled upon her. She had got a second and far more promising chance than the first. Surely there was a fair prospect now of rehabilitation and recovery? And she had made such an excellent start! These jewels—how she blessed them! They gave her just the capital she needed for a fresh enterprise, and already, at the very outset, she had come across exactly the man she wanted—Mr. Vansittart, the millionaire. She had been properly introduced to him—thanks to her astuteness in winning the General over. She had made an impression upon him. Why should she not win him too—the biggest prize she had yet come across in the lottery of her vagabond life?

All that she needed now was a fair field and a proper equipment. They were both within her reach, now that she had sufficient funds

to procure them. Crealoch made no objection. She was quite dazzled and overcome by her brilliant partner, and readily acquiesced in the expenditure—Mary called it a business investment. They must have an establishment—small, but well mounted, in a smart quarter. It was necessary to give an address in Paris when disposing of jewels, the price for which could only be paid, according to French law, at the seller's domicile. Besides, Mary made no secret of the glowing hopes that animated her with regard to her new friend, Vansittart.

"I must receive him properly, Crealoch, as a Princess ought. He is worth trying for. They say he is worth at least seven millions of pounds. You don't quite take that in, eh? Well, when I am his wife I shall be able to buy the rest of the stones myself, and at your own price. Now do you understand?"

Mrs. Crealoch was enchanted, and once more blessed her stars at having joined forces with this marvellous creature. At the same time, she hugged herself with the thought of the twenty crisp five-pound notes she always carried about with her, carefully concealed

within the lining of her stays. At any rate, she had a little purse for herself, whatever might occur.

Within a few days the two Princesses had set up a pretty, pleasant little *ménage* in an entresol upon the Boulevard Haussmann. They had taken the apartment furnished just as it stood; but a small outlay, cleverly applied in draperies and china, soon transformed the rooms, and gave them the elegant prettiness of a charming woman's home.

Mr. Vansittart came the day after he learnt the address, and was very warmly welcomed. He was charmed with the elder Princess. The old lady with the soft white hair was so pretty, yet so stately, so simple and unaffected, yet so keenly alive to the proprieties, that Vansittart's liking was mixed with a certain awe of this fine type of the ancient *régime*. But although she watched her daughter closely, and now warned, now scolded her, Mary managed to make many opportunities for pleasant flirtation. There is no city in the world better adapted than Paris for the purpose.

When Mary, of a morning, trotted off with

Crealoch to visit certain famous shops in the Rue de la Paix, whether it was to choose a dress, try on a new bonnet, or order another pair of exquisite slippers, an active figure soon caught them up in the street, and from that moment Crealoch discreetly dropped into the background. When Mr. Vansittart brought a carriage to take the mother and daughter for an afternoon drive in the Bois, it was natural enough that the two young people should take a brisk walk together under the shady trees, or try an ice at the café of the Cascade, while Madame la Princesse sat still. They could gossip behind Mary's fan in the box at the theatre when the trio went in state to see the last new piece. When the old lady nodded after dinner at restaurant or hotel, the talk between the others could be as sweet and confidential as though they were quite alone.

So the days ran on blissfully in a quiet, tranquil current, tending steadily to the great end which Mary always kept in view—marriage with the millionaire, which was, indeed, within reasonable distance if only she could secure her divorce. For her very first step—and in this she

had not been accompanied by Mr. Vansittart—was to visit a notary, and commence proceedings for a divorce. But the French law did not move as rapidly as she would have liked. If only she could be freed before the detested Walgate was released from gaol! He had been duly sentenced, but only for six months, and he would be at large again in the early autumn. It was a terrible ever-present fear that he might turn up in time to upset her plans, and utterly spoil her future life.

Then suddenly a very disquieting, even threatening, incident occurred. It became necessary to meet the serious inroads made on their store by Mary's outfit to dispose of another stone. After much anxious deliberation, Mary selected a fine ruby, of which there were five in the collection—all valuable stones. The transaction was completed without difficulty at one of the principal jewellers' in the Rue de la Paix. Mary and Crealoch had gone together, and both had been uncomfortably conscious that they had been watched in and out of the shop. She had seen no one, nor had Crealoch; yet both seemed to recognise in the loafer who hung

about the door the very same slip-shod little Jew whom they had seen at Charing Cross Station.

It was, indeed, Issachar Lewis, who, after many days, had once more come upon the object of his search. Of course, he had missed the Princess Pahlovsky when he arrived in Paris, much battered and knocked about. They could give him no news of her at the Hôtel de Bâle. He did not dare confess to his grandfather that he had lost touch of her, still less the reason of his failure. He only communicated the news he had heard about Walgate from the detective officer, and then set himself to hunt all over Paris for Walgate's wife. At last he came across her, visiting a jeweller's—Sempach and Le Gros, in the Rue de la Paix.

A few days later M. Sempach called at the Boulevard Haussmann, where he had already handed over the price of the ruby—eleven thousand francs, or just £440.

"A very strange thing has happened, Madame la Princesse," he began with many apologies, bowing low to both ladies. "It is about that stone we bought from you. Would madame mind saying where she obtained it?"

"Not the least in the world. It was one in a necklace given me by my grandfather on my marriage. I never liked the necklace, and I had it broken up, using the gems in other ways, except the one I sold you, which I did not care to keep."

"I understand, perfectly. I only ask because a young man came to us some days ago and asked to see the stone. We demurred, but he satisfied us he was in the trade, and gave good reason for his request. When he had examined it through the magnifying-glass, he told us a surprising, almost incredible, story."

"Ah!" It was the elder Princess, who could not conceal her apprehension.

"Pray continue, monsieur," said Mary at once, with great composure.

"The youth, Lewis by name, boldly asserted that the ruby was one of a large parcel of stones stolen from his grandfather fifty years ago."

"What a strange story!" Mary remarked quickly. "But I suppose such things have happened before?"

"What has happened before?" asked

another and a fresh voice. It was Mr. Vansittart who, at this most inopportune moment, was shown in. His unexpected appearance completely unnerved the elder woman, who, with a half-hysterical sob, rose from her seat and hastily left the room.

"Why, this, Mr. Vansittart. Stolen property has sometimes found its way into honest hands. Mine, I trust"—and she held out two dazzlingly white, exquisitely shaped hands—"mine are honest, and yet this gentleman, M. Sempach, of the Rue de la Paix, tells me they have been dealing with stolen jewels."

"Delightful!" laughed Mr. Vansittart. "What, pray, has induced you to say that?" he asked rather sharply, in French, of the jeweller, who began to explain volubly.

"You did really sell him this stone?" asked Mr. Vansittart.

"Yes," faltered Mary, who felt very unhappy, fearing what might come next. "I—I—"

"Stay, Princess; I think I can understand. May I ask you, as a great personal favour, to allow me to settle this?"

"Oh, if Mr. Vansittart takes the matter upon his shoulders," said the Frenchman, with a sycophantic grin.

"I will, and I will answer for the Princess in this or anything else, if she will only permit me. There, go to your mother, do ;" and as he spoke he almost forced Mary to leave the room.

"Where is this stone—a ruby was it? How much did you give for it?"

The man hesitated.

"Come. You know me. I am worth making friends with. Tell me the exact price, and I will buy it back from you. The actual price, mind. I don't mean to pay more."

"Eleven thousand francs," said M. Sempach a little ruefully, as he had hoped to make a considerable profit on the stone.

"You shall have a cheque to-night. Now kindly go, and leave me the stone."

Then, when Mary came back alone, he presented it to her.

"May I make you my first present? Do not refuse it. It makes me sad to think that it may be necessary for ladies of your rank to part with your jewels. Princess—Mary—will you

give me the right to prevent this? Will you accept——”

He went up closer to her and seized her hand, as he tried to look into her averted, tearful eyes.

“No, no. You must not ask it—not yet, not yet;” and with a brusque movement she broke from him and left the room.

“They are queer creatures,” said Vansittart to himself philosophically. “I suppose I have been premature.”

But that evening he took heart of grace, and resolved to speak again a little later on. A letter came to him from the Princess, which bid him “farewell,” yet revived his hopes upon the same page.

“Dear Friend,” she wrote, “my mother’s health obliges us to leave Paris at once. We are going to the seaside, to a quiet little secluded watering-place on the Brittany coast. It is far too dull a spot for so worldly a person as Mr. Atchison Vansittart. But we shall go on from there to Trouville or Dieppe. People often bring their yachts to Trouville, although I believe it is an open roadstead. At Dieppe there is an

excellent harbour
the Italian lake
meet you, I w
we return to Pa
say adieu, but a



CHAPTER XIX.

ON LAKE COMO.

IF there is a paradise upon earth, to all outward seeming, it is the broad stretch of deep water which washes Cadenabbia on one side, Bellagio on the other, and is the centre, so to speak, of the many-armed Lake of Como.

The place is most perfect in early autumn, when summer heats are over, and the falling season gives mellowness to the foliage and a deeper violet to the surrounding amphitheatre of hills. The smooth, unrippled surface of the water reflects every mood of the changeful sky. Brightness and colour irradiate the scene ; everything wears a holiday aspect. Flags and streamers and gay awnings flaunt over the flotilla of small boats, with their good-looking boatmen dressed in snow-white suits and crimson sashes ; there is a sound of soft music as it floats across the water ; merry laughter fills the air from day-dawn, when the bathers plunge into the cool lake, till long after midnight, while

gossips never tire, and lovers grow passionate under the silver moon.

Towards sundown a smart four-oared wherry is brought swiftly to the foot of the marble stairs that lead up to the Bella Vista Hotel. In the stern sheets sit the Princess, Mary Pahlovsky, and a gentleman, no other than Mr. Atchison P. Vansittart, of New York and Colorado.

He is young and active, and as the boat runs alongside, he springs lightly ashore and helps his companion to land. She puts her pretty hand in his, and he holds it just one moment longer than is absolutely necessary, and with enough pressure to evoke the protest—

“Don’t; you are *méchant*. There are people up there—dozens—on the terrace. They do not know yet.”

“That I have a right—all but a legal right—to squeeze your hand? Say another word, and I’ll kiss you before their faces, and so proclaim my conquest to all the world.”

“If you dare!” she said, so smilingly and prettily that he is more than ever in love with the beautiful woman whom, at last, he has made captive to his bow and spear. It was a long and

exciting chase, but he followed her everywhere through France to Switzerland, and now to Como, with the untiring energy of a man who has a strong determination to win and ample, unlimited means to back up his will.

"It's a case with those two," says one of the lookers-on, who, as usual, saw most of the game.

"I wouldn't give much for your chances, Lyttelton," laughed another to a young fellow who comes from the Embassy at Rome, and whom the Princess has also bewitched.

"I call it monstrous!" cried Lyttelton. "Why should a Yankee, with his beastly dollars, cut in and win such a Princess?"

"She is one of the most charming creatures I have ever seen," says an old and courtly Frenchman. "I bow to her beauty, but as to her rank—I am not so sure."

"What does it matter? They make up the highest aristocracy between them, according to modern ideas—that of money and looks." The speaker was a cynical English M.P., who was just finishing his third dozen of luscious green figs that day.

Meanwhile, Mary and Vansittart have passed on. They were certainly a striking pair—the man with his supple, well-knit figure and bright, manly face; the woman—well, we have seen Mary Walgate under many aspects, in many varying moods; but never had she seemed more lovely than now, as with fluttering draperies and triumphant air she sails past her critics and admirers. There is the light of conquest in her brilliant eyes, victory in her step, in the proud carriage of her queenly head.

At last she had reached the pinnacle of her most ambitious dreams. In a short time—directly she had authoritative news of the divorce, the need for which was still a secret to her future husband—she would become Mrs. Vansittart, and hoped to have all the world at her feet.

The old Princess would have been absolutely happy now but for the fears and forebodings she could never dismiss from her mind. She liked the prospect of this new match, for she had formed a high opinion of Mr. Vansittart. He was so unsuspecting and so straightforward; he had shown such chivalrous confidence in the

woman who had carried his heart by storm ; he had thought no evil, sought no explanation, was so satisfied to take these highly-titled ladies at their own price, without an idea of intruding on their past, that her heart had gone out to him, and she loved him already as a son.

Yet at this very moment Mary was still undivorced ! Her husband might turn up to claim her—or, at least, to expose her true situation ; to reveal the degradation through which his wife (albeit through no fault of her own) had recently passed. Worse still, the funds with which these two Princesses were keeping up their state in the best apartments of a first-class hotel came from a source that could not be avowed, the discovery of which must lower them, especially Mary, in the eyes of her lover, lose her his respect, and probably disgrace her irretrievably.

So it was that the poor old lady harped continually on one chord. Again and again she besought her daughter to make a clean breast of it, and not even to accept Mr. Vansittart until the divorce had been actually decreed.

“Think, my child, what it would be if he finds anything out ! You are imperilling

everything—his and your happiness—for I believe he is fond of you.”

“I know it, darling mother ; and I—I—love him as I have never loved or thought I loved before. That is why I dare not speak to him. I cannot demean myself before him. I cannot run the risk of losing him now that it has gone so far.”

“You are doing far worse, Nada ; and you will bring about just what you most fear. Besides, it is the only right—the only honourable course. I cannot, will not, permit Mr. Vansittart to be kept in the dark. If you will not tell him, I must.”

“No, no ; not yet, dearest mother—not yet. His love is so sweet to me ; let me keep it only a little longer. Then I will speak to him myself.”

“It is because I want to preserve his love to you for always that I so strongly counsel you to take him into your confidence at once. Every hour you delay is dangerous.”

Mary was to realise only too soon the wisdom of her mother’s advice. But while she waited and hesitated events marched rapidly forward and carried her with them.

First, General Macintire turned up unexpectedly. He had been in the Engadine, where he had heard of the beautiful Princess Pahlovsky at Como, and knew that it must be his friend. He could not resist the pleasure of renewing his acquaintance, as he put it, but it was evident that he would be glad to take it up where he had left it—at Minter's Hotel. But then he quickly saw how the land lay, and acknowledging that Vansittart was in every way a more suitable match, he withdrew at once, and entirely, from the field.

A strong bond of sympathy sprang up almost instantaneously between him and the elder Princess. He appreciated her fine upright character, and she was deeply grateful to him for his kindness to her daughter at the time of her greatest trouble. The confidence grew and increased between them, until one day the old lady, rather rashly seeking his advice and support, blurted out the whole secret story of the jewels.

But here she left firm ground. She fell straightway into an abyss indeed, for the General was instantly transformed—changed

from the kindly, warm-hearted friend into the stern magistrate, the inflexible official and upholder of the law.

“My dear madam, I am sorry, truly sorry, you have told me this,” he said severely. “It is no longer a question between us—between the Princess Pahlovsky and Rupert Macintire ; it is a matter of law and justice. Those jewels do not, cannot, belong to your daughter. You know that, and admit it yourself. I go further, and I must insist upon their immediate surrender. I claim them on behalf of the prison authorities, whom I represent. They, when it is fitting, will restore them to those who can establish a claim to their ownership. But your daughter cannot be allowed to retain them, not an instant now. I must see her and tell her this at once. I trust she will accept my decision without demur. It would be painful to me to have to take other measures.”

Mary's troubles were becoming very near and threatening. Already that very day, and before General Macintire could have speech with her, she was called upon to face a new situation that was likely to extinguish all her hopes.

CHAPTER XX.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE Lake of Como was made for lovers. By its smiling shores are endless trysting-places—innumerable bowers and retreats contrived on purpose, as it seems, for declarations of undying affection, protestations of changeless constancy, and all the soft, sweet prayers and responses that make up the lover's litany.

A very favourite walk with Mary and Vansittart was along the terrace towards the Villa Carlotta. There was shade all the way under the shimmering chestnuts, and seats at all the best points of view across the lake. Sometimes, especially on days not public, they passed into the ornate gates of the villa with a golden key, and wandered hand in hand through the flowering paths of the magnificent gardens maintained by their princely owners regardless of cost.

On the very afternoon that the elder Princess had revealed their true position to General

Macintire they had found their way as usual to the villa, and were presently ensconced in a secluded spot, enjoying a blissful *tête-à-tête*.

"I thought it was not a public day," said Mary crossly. "What a nuisance! I hoped we might be quite alone."

"But it is *not* a public day," replied Vansittart, positively. "We shall, or ought to have, the place entirely to ourselves. That was my compact with the janitor."

"I certainly heard the gates opened and shut behind us, and I thought I saw a figure moving through the foliage over there," persisted Mary.

"One of the gardener's assistants, no doubt. He need not bother us. Let us talk about ourselves—about our future—about the day—" and he looked lovingly and longingly into her lustrous violet eyes.

"You are so impetuous, Atchison. It was only yesterday that we met," said the woman, coquetting.

"I am in a hurry, and that's a fact. It's our way; we are a spry people, we Americans, as you may have heard. What we want we

mean to get—right away. I want you, Mary, and I can't afford to wait—long."

"Suppose anything were to come between us, Atchison," whispered Mary, as she nestled closer to him.

"Nothing shall. Why, Mary, what are you afraid of? What makes you say that?"

"It is a crooked world, full of mischances and ups and downs. Something—somebody—might put you against me."

"I should not believe them. If it was a man, he'd have to swallow it pretty quick, I reckon; and if he didn't, I'd help it down his throat."

"Would you still love me, Atchison, just the same, if, if——" She could not say it; she lacked courage. Confession, self-abasement, would not come from her unwilling tongue. "Suppose I was only a poor, commonplace country girl?"

"You could never be commonplace, Mary, whatever your origin."

"Suppose I had not been born a Princess?"

"You would always be a Princess to me, my own, my queen;" and as he spoke he drew

her to him and kissed her again and again upon the lips rapturously.

"There, there, please be quiet; someone is coming. Someone, I fancy, is watching us, or moving among the shrubbery over there."

"Shall I go and kick him out? Not that I care who sees us—who comes. I want all the world to know what I have won, and what I mean to keep against them all."

"I feel so safe with you, Atchison," said Mary, clinging to him. "I know you will shield me and protect me."

"Why, what is the matter, honey? You seem frightened."

"Yes, I am frightened—at my great happiness. I fear to lose it. It is too great, too bright to last."

"If that is so, let us make an immediate end of all your doubts. Let us get married, right now. What is to hinder us? You have no father to ask; your mother consents and approves. Let us run straight down to Genoa; there is a United States' Consul there, and we'll be tied up first in your church and then before him by American law. I'll have the yacht

round from Nice, and we'll go—east, west, south, to India, Japan, South Sea Islands, anywhere you please."

"Oh, if we only could ; if we only might !" Mary almost gasped in ecstasy at this enticing proposal to sail away out—out on the boundless ocean, away from haunting memories, present dangers, future disgrace. What a blissful escape !

"Well, we will," said the American lover, with the quiet firmness of an autocrat who consults only his own sweet pleasure.

"No, dear Atchison ; it is impossible. Think—my mother—"

"We will take her with us, or she shall be made all snug and comfortable in Paris, London, or St. Petersburg, just as she chooses. Is it a bargain ? Don't go back on your first sweet suggestion."

"I would go with you now, darling, to the very end of the world at once, without a word or a thought, if, if—only I dared. But—"

She checked herself abruptly, with a short, quick, stifled cry of anguish, as though in extreme terror or excruciating pain.

Her lover, looking at her in deep anxiety, saw that she had suddenly grown deadly pale; there was a film over her eyes; her heart must have stopped; life was all but extinct. Then, with a tremendous effort, she revived. The sharp spur of her overmastering terror overcame her weakness, and she whispered—

“Quick! quick! water! Run, dear, to the house. Bring me a glass of water.”

“But, darling, I cannot leave you like this.”

“Yes, yes! I shall soon be all right if only I have some water. Do go!”

“My own, be brave. I will be back directly.” He stooped down and kissed her white forehead tenderly.

Would he ever kiss her again?

The moment Mr. Vansittart had disappeared down the green alley Mary turned towards a great bush of begonia in full flower, and said sharply—

“Come out! I have seen you lurking about. I know it is you. Come out!”

A man, decently but poorly dressed, walked forward at her invitation, and taking off his slouch hat, with a grand obeisance full of

hideous mockery, stood bare-headed before her.

"I am at the order of Madame la Princesse," he said.

It was Hugh Walgate, her husband.

"So you have dogged my footsteps and found me out?" Mary hissed, in a voice of bitter, concentrated hate.

"A pleasant meeting it is, too," he sneered, "to find one's wife in another man's arms."

"Your wife! You know that I have repudiated you; that I have applied to the law to be rid of you."

"*Ta, ta, ma belle.* No heroics. There are two sides to that. I do not agree. I have opposed the divorce. You claim it because I am a convicted felon; I oppose it because you are the same. We are tied tightly, you see, and for ever."

"You mean, ruffianly scoundrel!"

"No hard names, d'ye hear?" He spoke with fierce menace. "Tell me quickly who is this other man I find you with. Tell me at once, or I will ask him himself when he returns."

"It is Mr. Vansittart, an American."

"The great Cræsus? Mary, you are immense! What a bold and splendid game! Is it strange that I do not wish to part with you? We might still do wonders together. I'll tell you what——"

A brilliant idea had struck him.

"Suppose I leave you now, before he comes back—will you meet me at some other time—this evening—alone in a safe place? I have much to say to you—about yourself—about the jewels."

"The jewels! Can it be possible that you know? How have you heard?"

"That is my business. Anyway, I mean to cut in, as I shall explain to you this evening if you condescend to come."

"Yes, yes—I promise!" cried Mary, who, although terribly perturbed, caught eagerly at this brief reprieve. "This evening, between six and seven, I will meet you in the little garden just beyond the hotel, towards Menaggio. I promise, if only you will leave me now."

"Mind, do not sell me! It will be worse for you. I am here, remember, watching you

closely all the time. If you play me false I will spoil all your game."

"Go, go, till this evening."

He sprang quickly through the close-woven bushes, and was gone just before Vansittart reappeared.

CHAPTER XXI.

RESTITUTION.

MARY went straight to her rooms, when, with Vansittart's loving help, she made her way back to the hotel. He left her there to the tender care of her mother, saying —

“I shall come up to inquire, Princess. She's been very upset, but I hope it is not much. Mary will be best with you.”

“Something terrible has happened, my child,” began the elder Princess, whose mind was still agitated by what General Macintire had told her.

“Terrible, indeed!” replied her daughter, thinking only of her own trouble. “Hugh Walgate is here.”

“Gracious heaven! Does he dare——”

“Everything. Claims me. He has resisted, opposed the divorce. Threatens me. I do not know with what, or what he knows. But he has heard about those wretched jewels.”

"Oh, Mary, did I not say they would prove a curse? Have nothing more to do with them. Give them up now—at once—to General Macintire. He insists upon their surrender into his hands."

"Does the General know, then?" asked Mary, turning sharply on her mother. "Have you betrayed the secret? You had no right; it was wicked of you."

"Mary, I did it for you, to spare you worse. Suppose Mr. Vansittart had found out. What would he have thought?"

"Never mind the jewels, mother. Let them go," said Mary, wearily. "Their loss is nothing. The General shall have them—Lewis, their owners—I will throw them into the lake. What do I care? If only—only I might keep my love. Mother, mother, tell me; advise me! Must I lose him now, just when I have reached happiness, as I thought?" There was an agony of despair in her wailing voice and tortured, sorrow-stricken face.

"Mary, you are a child of misfortune. Ill luck pursues you, clings to you, because, because——"

How could the soft-hearted mother upbraid her suffering child ?

“Of course, you blame me. I have brought all this on myself. Had I been only content with our old, sordid, ugly, narrow life, I might have mated in a lower station; married some tradesman, and settled down into a humdrum household drudge—I, a princess born !”

“You would have been a happy mother, a contented wife, with an unsullied conscience and no stain upon your noble birthright.”

“Bah !” cried Mary, as she sprang to her feet and paced the room with rapid strides. “I was not made for it. Poverty, obscurity, I could not have endured. Nor will I face them now. I will *not* be dragged back and drawn down into the depths of misery and crime. Mother, I love Atchison Vansittart, and he loves me, deeply, passionately. I will not give him up—never, never ! I will go away with him, fly with him to the uttermost ends of the earth.”

“To saddle him with a great burthen of guilt, and yourself with an ineffaceable disgrace. Don’t talk of love. The sacred word is soiled

by such a shameful project. I pity you, Mary, now, as ever, in your terrible trial. Do not make me despise you."

"What would you have me do, mother?" asked Mary humbly, changing at once from heroics to fresh despair.

"That which is right. First and foremost, make restitution. Let us send for General Macintire and place the jewels in his hands."

"Very well. I will do so. The sooner the better; before Crealoch can interfere. Remember, I am not alone in this business."

"Crealoch is out, fortunately. I gave her leave for the day. She has gone to Como with some of the other English servants—friends she has made here in the hotel. She will not be back till late."

"That's a comfort. She need know nothing till it is all over. Mother dear, will you go to the General yourself? Bring him here quickly. Avoid Mr. Vansittart. Why should he know? Let me at least retain his good opinion—as long as I can."

When the General came to their little private sitting-room, he bowed stiffly to Mary.

"I came at your mother's request. Why, I do not exactly know."

"To accept a trust, General Macintire. I am much to blame, no doubt; but I have been deeply wronged, and I am not wholly bad, believe me. I wish to make restitution. These jewels—"

And she brought forward a handsome dressing-case, which had been purchased partly as an item in her gorgeous outfit, partly as a safe receptacle for her valuables. From an inner pocket she took out a morocco box, unlocked it, and poured upon the table a number of unset stones. Then she tore the rings from her fingers, the pearls from her ears, a diamond pin from her hair, and added them to the little heap before her.

"I had these set for daily wear," she explained. "It seemed foolish not to make use of them. There were three other stones, but I have sold them. Some day I may repay their cost, if God gives me life and health and strength."

"He will, Nada; He will," said the poor old Princess, with streaming eyes.

"And I am to take these in trust? For whom? Have you any idea to whom they rightly belong?" asked General Macintire.

Then Mary told the whole story of Emily Laurence—of her daring robbery from the jeweller's assistant, of the reappearance of the latter as Mr. Lewis when she sought to dispose of part of her Millbank treasure trove.

"I understand," the General said briefly. "I accept the trust, and will see that justice is done. Can I be of any further service?"

"There is only one thing more I would beg of you, if I may," Mary said shyly, and with blushing embarrassment. "Is there any reason, any need to bring my name forward? Will you, can you, spare me that? Do not, I implore you, tell—"

"Mr. Vansittart? Why should I? But if I might advise you, I would urge you to tell him everything yourself."

Mary shook her head sadly, as though the task was beyond her strength; and then the General, still grave—for in his upright, honest old soldier's heart he was greatly grieved and disappointed—bowed and took his leave.

"Now, mother," said Mary, when they were once more alone, "the time is running on. That is the second dinner bell. I chose this hour as the safest. I must now steal out and meet this cur—face him, dare him, trample on him, if I can! I could kill him where he stands!"

Walgate was waiting for her at the appointed spot when she arrived, carefully disguised in a long, close cloak, which shrouded her from head to heels.

"You slippery she-devil! I almost feared you would sell me like a dog," he began at once, with a string of curses, as he seized her roughly by the wrist. "But now I've got you, I'll stick to you."

"Let me go. There are men down there—boatmen. They know me. I will call to them for help."

"They will know me better still, if you try to thwart me—if you do not agree to my terms."

"What are they? What is it you want? Be quick, or I shall leave you."

"Will you?" he said threateningly. "We'll see about that. But listen. I want those jewels, first of all."

She shook her head defiantly. Why tell him that she had already parted with them?

"What jewels? Explain."

"Don't try to stall me off. I know the whole story, except exactly how you got them. But it was some big plant, of course; and you hadn't the sense to palm off the swag. The idea of your going to the very man that lost them!"

"I do not understand you in the least."

"Yah! It won't do. Why, they came to me to help them to recover them. They knew I was your husband, your pal, that I could help them, and promised me a big slice out of the plunder—more, I bet, than you could get from any fence" (receiver of stolen goods). "So you'll hand over the swag, d'ye hear?"

"What other terms have you to propose?"

"Look here, Mary Walgate, you're dead nuts on this Yankee. Isn't that a fact? Well, I won't stand in your light. Marry him, if you want to."

"You won't oppose the divorce?" cried Mary eagerly, showing her hand.

"Oho! I was right, then. You are sweet

upon him, or on his dollars. Which is it, eh? No, my affectionate and devoted wife, you misunderstand me. You may marry him—indeed, I wish you to marry him—but without being first divorced from me.”

“Bigamy? I do not understand.”

“Yes, bigamy; and then I shall hold you, both of you, in the hollow of my hand. I don’t object to your marriage with the man of your heart, but he must pay—through you—for the privilege.”

“You mean, despicable hound!” shouted Mary, beside herself with fury and indignation at the atrocious proposal. “I would never consent to anything so base.”

“Then I will stop your philandering with this new flame of yours. I will expose you, spoil your game, drive you out.”

“You pitiless, unscrupulous, thorough-paced scoundrel! I think you are a devil!” said Mary. “I will not stay here to listen to you further.”

“Then go and be ——. Only listen to my last words. Will you give me up those jewels?”

“Never, never, never!” answered Mary bravely, knowing, too, that she could not if she would.

“Then I shall come and take them—to-night, to-morrow night, when it suits me, with or without your leave!” he shouted after her as she walked rapidly away.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

THE Princesses occupied a suite of three rooms on the first floor facing the lake, in the very best part of the hotel. There was a bedroom at each end, with a sitting-room between, communicating with both. Crealoch, the lady's maid, had a small dressing-room, with a bed in it, off Mary's; and being an end room, its window was not to the lake, but overlooked an outhouse and a small side yard of the hotel. Crealoch fully appreciated the quarters she occupied, which were in keeping with the relative position of mistress and maid, while she could have ready access to the dressing-bag, where the jewels, by mutual consent between the parties, were constantly bestowed. Each had a key to the bag.

When Crealoch returned late that evening, she heard first of Mary's indisposition. Her mistress had gone to bed. Why disturb her?

One glance, as she stole into the room on tiptoe and looked around, satisfied her that the dressing bag was there in its usual place upon the chest of drawers. For one night at least her usual inspection need not be made. Better let Mary sleep on undisturbed. The fact was Crealoch had grown to have complete confidence in her mistress, and knowing of her engagement to the rich American gentleman, hoped that ere long there would be a dissolution of the firm, and a full settlement, very much to Crealoch's advantage.

People keep late hours on the Cadenabbia side of the lake. The nights are so balmy and beautiful that everyone seems reluctant to leave the terrace, where gossip continues till long after midnight, while the Neapolitan buffo singers still twang their guitars and dance quaint steps to their own words.

Mr. Vansittart was still in his chair, the very last to retire. He had lighted another—quite the twentieth—cigar, and was about to rise lazily to take one more look at his Mary's window, lighted dimly through the close-drawn blinds, when he suddenly realised that he was

not having the silence and the solitude all to himself.

A long shadow was creeping, creeping cautiously along the moonlit wall of the hotel. It was certainly moving. It was as undoubtedly of a strange suspicious form—that of a man going on all fours; and no man can want to walk on all fours after midnight, when no one else is by, unless that man's intentions are evil, and cannot be avowed.

Remaining where he was, still and motionless, making no sign, Vansittart followed the shadow till it disappeared round the angle of the hotel. Then he got up, stole quickly after it, and was in time to see the figure of a man clambering up an outhouse, the roof of which was not many feet below a window—the window, in fact, of Crealoch's room, which Vansittart knew from its immediate proximity to Mary's, and because he had been upstairs once with a message from the mistress to her maid.

"What is he at? Burglary? Impossible, surely, in this busy, always-crowded hotel. I'm sorry for prim old Mrs. Crealoch, anyway. I suppose I ought to give the alarm."

He walked away towards the front entrance of the hotel, took a few more turns upon the deserted terrace, listening in the dead silence to the waters lapping at its base, and thinking only of his love.

Then, clear-cut and shrill, a wild shriek rent the midnight air ; another and yet another. Then a sudden pistol shot, a second and a third ; then all was still.

They came from the bedroom—Mary's, adjoining Crealoch's—just over his head.

“ That fellow was after no good ! Fool that I was, I let him get too much of a start ; ” and with one bound Vansittart entered the hotel and ran upstairs.

He was the first on the scene. With scant ceremony, as his hurried knock was not answered, he entered the sitting-room. It was empty and dark. But from one room a light streamed in through the communicating doorway, and he heard in the same direction a confused babel of sounds—voices, lamentations, groans.

Vansittart pushed forward, but pulled up short—awe-stricken, aghast—upon the threshold of the room.

He stood in the presence of some terrible drama, a horrifying, bloodthirsty crime.

A woman's body lay prostrate, motionless, seemingly dead, upon the floor; close to it was another—a man's—in which life was not yet extinct, for he writhed and twisted, and in his agony uttered horrible groans.

In a far-off corner were the two Princesses. The mother was bending over her daughter, seeking to calm and pacify her, as she crouched there quivering with excitement, shivering with terror, an indistinct, formless heap of white draperies, showing that she had been rudely disturbed, probably from sleep.

"What has happened? What can it mean?" asked Vansittart brusquely, with no attempt at apology for his intrusion. He was wanted there evidently—that was enough.

"Thank Heaven you have come," answered the elder Princess. "I think she is going mad. I feel I shall if she does not speak soon. Ask her; rouse her. She seems dazed, stupefied. I can get nothing out of her. Yet no one else can know."

"Mary, my darling, my own sweet pet," began Vansittart tenderly.

"No, no!" shrieked Mary suddenly. "Do not speak to me like that. I am accursed!"

"Mary, for Heaven's sake——"

"Listen, then, I will tell you;" and staring at him with great wide-open, lack-lustre eyes, she slowly syllabled her account of the dread catastrophe. "That man yonder is a thief—a low thief—who broke in here to rob and plunder. See, there lie the proofs of his attempt."

She pointed to the floor, where, tossed here and there in great disorder, lay the contents of her dressing-case. It had been torn open and rifled. The drawers, the wardrobe, every piece of furniture had been ransacked, no doubt in search of valuables.

"Crealoch, my poor devoted friend, must have heard him, and surprised him in the act. She must have come in to rouse me to defend my person, my effects; and then he attacked her. I woke and saw the struggle. Horrible! But she was as brave as a lion, and turned on him with this dagger."

She held out for them to see a long, straight, double-edged stiletto, which was always part of the equipment of Mary's dressing-case—a

paper-knife, its nominal purpose; but to be used in self-defence, perhaps, in the hour of dangerous need.

The weapon was reeking still with blood.

"I tore it from her hands too late. She had already stabbed him in the back. Then it was that, although faint and staggering, he drew his revolver and fired three shots—two at her and one at me. He has killed her; but she, I think, had already paid him his due."

"It is false!" The denial came with horrible distinctness from the expiring wretch, who had, in one convulsive effort, raised himself, and, leaning on one hand, pointed fiercely at Mary with the other.

"It—is—false!" he hissed out again. "She—Mary Walgate—did it. She has murdered me—she, my wife!" and, with one last gasp, he rolled over, dead.

"Great heaven!" cried Vansittart. "What awful thing is this he is saying? Is he her husband? Speak, Madame, or you——"

But neither would answer, and while he still waited a noisy hubbub was heard approaching. At last the people of the hotel, with ever

so many of the guests who had been aroused by the unwonted disturbance, were nearing the spot whence it proceeded.

"Not a word now. Do not attempt to excuse yourself. Throw away that knife."

These were the commands which the quick-witted American issued in the crisp, peremptory accents of a soldier in the heat of a fight.

Then he went out through the sitting-room to the head of the stairs, and addressed the assembled crowd.

"A terrible tragedy has occurred. Some man, still unknown and unrecognised, broke into the Princess Marie Pahlowsky's room, with the obvious intention of robbing her of her jewels. Her maid—poor soul!—heard the robber, and interfered with him in his operations. He turned upon her, and she stabbed him with a small ornamental dagger the Princess used as a paper-knife. Then the ruffian, who must have been mortally hurt, fired his revolver. The poor maid was struck down, and the mistress, who had just come in to her assistance, only narrowly escaped. Mr. Spaghetti," he went on, turning to the manager of the

hotel, "these are the facts, so far as I have ascertained them. You will communicate them to the authorities, and take all necessary steps. Meanwhile I think you will agree with me that we should leave these two unfortunate ladies to recover from this terrible shock, and for to-night at least respect their privacy and retire."

* * * * *

It was more than a nine-days' wonder—the burglary, and the double murder that followed it. People still talk of them, in season and out of season, at Cadenabbia. It is always an incomplete, often a garbled, story, for the true facts have never transpired.

Walgate was not identified. No papers were found upon him. His body bore no traces that could assist the Italian police in unravelling the mystery. It was always supposed, however, that he was English, and that he was a professional thief, who had wandered abroad in search of plunder, attracted probably to Como by the rumours of the wealthy visitors who stayed there. He had lodged a night or two in the little village of Trantino, just beyond

Cadenabbia; and that was all that was known of him.

The only persons who could have spoken were tongue-tied. Vansittart, although inexpressibly startled and shocked by the ruffian's last words—and dying speeches are usually accepted as fully entitled to credence—resolutely refused to fix the crime of murder on the woman he had so dearly loved. Indeed, he thought less of the killing than of the revelation of Mary's duplicity in concealing from him the fact of her marriage. That Walgate was really what he pretended the elder Princess never attempted to deny. Upon this point, and upon the whole of Mary's antecedent history, she was most truthfully explicit and outspoken. Only as regarded the catastrophe she could give no evidence; for she declared, and it was obviously true, that she had not reached the scene till after the blows were struck and the mischief done.

There remained Mary herself, but she could not be questioned further, even if Vansittart or General Macintire, or the officers of the law, had wished to sift her statement. After the one

brief flash of intelligence, during which she described the events of that terrible night, she sank into stupor, from which she only gradually emerged, and then into complete imbecility. She never recovered. The sudden shipwreck of her hopes, which had come upon her in so ghastly a fashion, had deprived her of reason. It would never be known through any confession of hers whether she or Crealoch had struck Walgate down. On this point Mr. Vansittart had no desire to be too curious. It fitted in with his chivalrous ideas that any woman assailed by robbers in the dead of night should defend herself to the death.

For many years afterwards—possibly they are there to this day—two ladies, mother and daughter, lived in the strictest seclusion, and with the utmost simplicity of life, at Qualfeggio, a pretty village upon the southern or Lecco arm of the lake. Local gossip credits them with high rank. It is whispered, indeed, that they are Russian Princesses exiled from home by political troubles. One is elderly—a bent, broken old woman, with careworn features and snow-white hair; the other is a strangely,

weirdly beautiful young woman, who will sit alone for hours in their little garden above the water, crooning a melancholy ditty, and winding flowers in and out of her long, luxuriant tresses. The villagers look up at her in silent, respectful, sympathetic awe. They know that she is bereft of reason.

There is no change in Mary Nada Pahlovsky day after day, save when the man comes on whom she lavished the full wealth of her wayward affection; and then she smiles a sad, short, wintry smile, and gratefully kisses his hand.

It is through the generosity of Mr. Vansittart that these two poor creatures have found this secure retreat from the storms of life. He has not deserted them, will never forget the only woman who had ever touched his heart; but when he comes, and that is frequently, it is as though he were making a sorrowful pilgrimage to this sad sepulchre of his earthly happiness.

THE END



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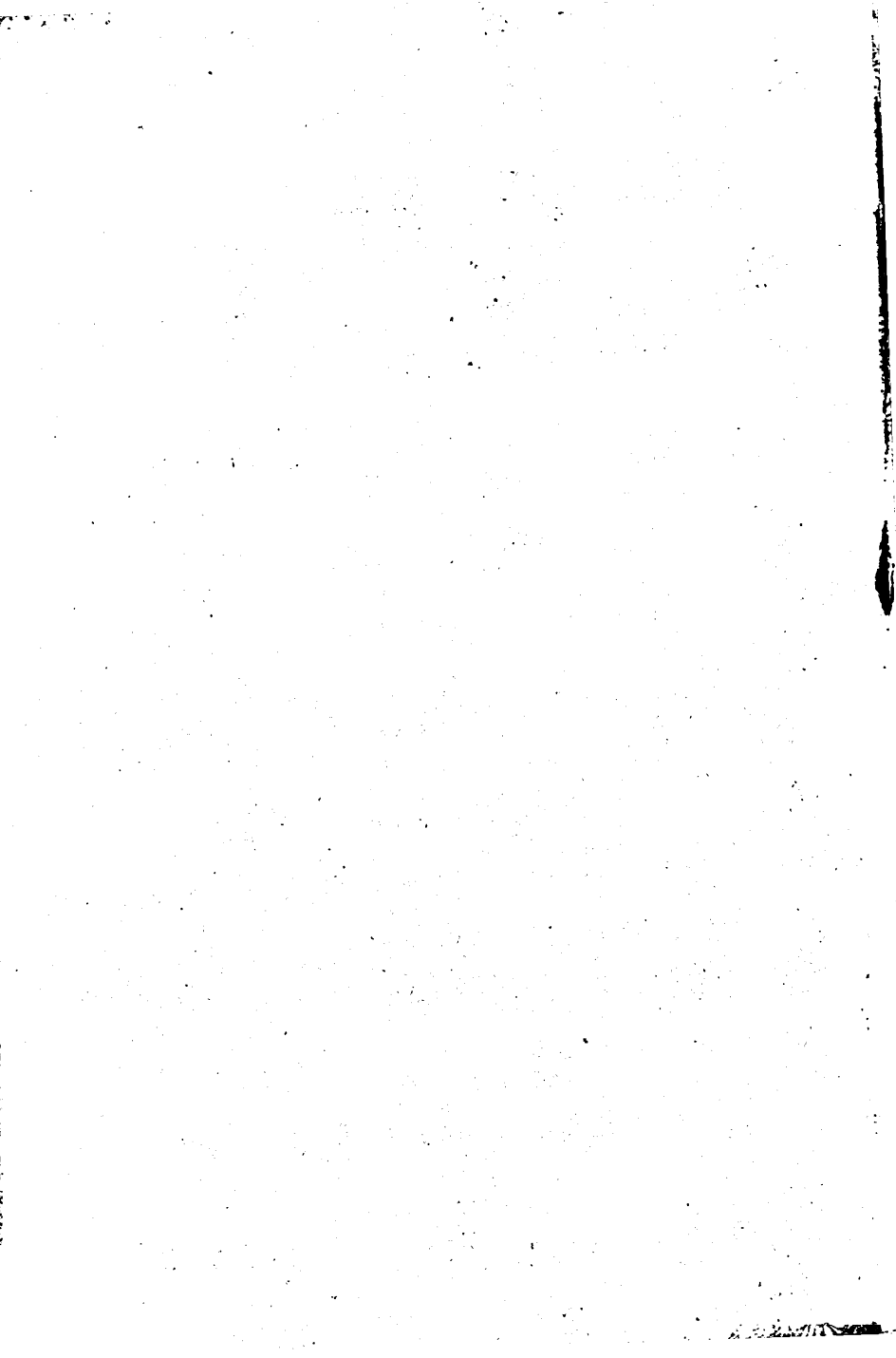
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